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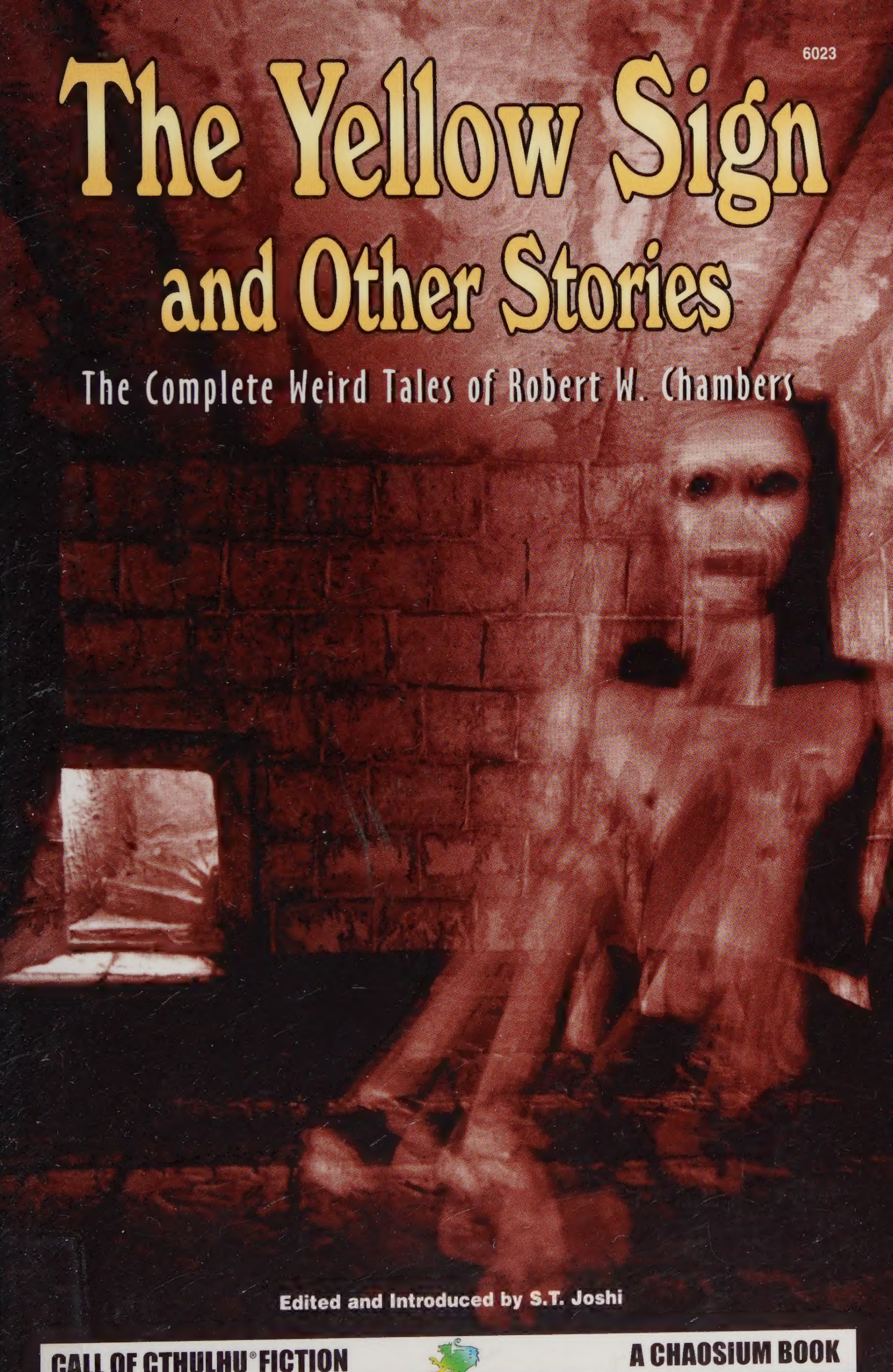
The Yellow Sign and Other Stories

The Complete Weird Tales of Robert W. Chambers



Edited and Introduced by S.T. Joshi

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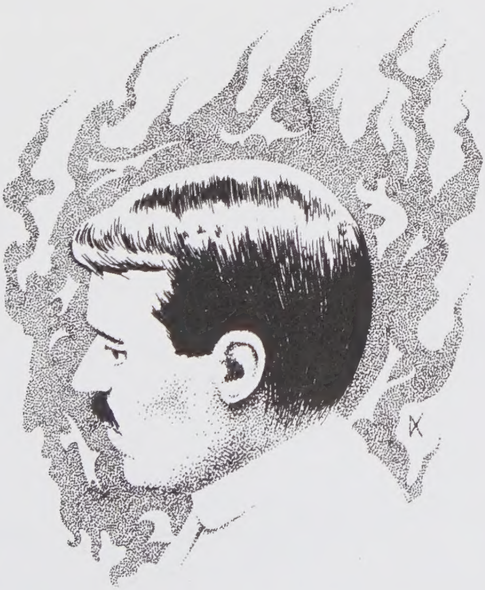

Robert W. Chambers

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The Yellow Sign and Other Stories

The Complete Weird Tales of Robert W. Chambers

Edited and Introduced by

S. T. Joshi

Chaosium, Inc.
2000

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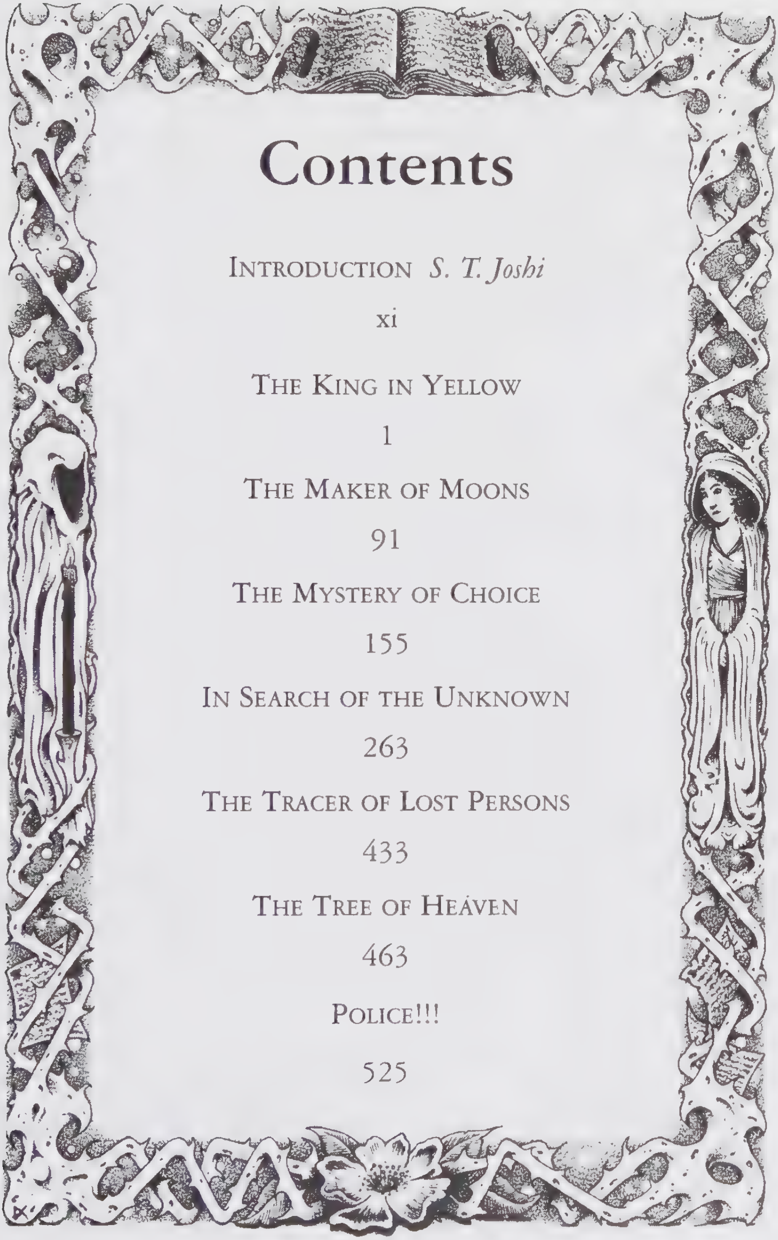

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Introduction

"Chambers is like Rupert Hughes and a few other fallen Titans—equipped with the right brains and education, but wholly out of the habit of using them." Such was H. P. Lovecraft's rather harsh judgment of Robert W. Chambers shortly after discovering him in 1927.[1] And if that judgment requires some small qualification, we must nevertheless agree with Frederic Taber Cooper's lugubrious assessment: "So much of Mr. Chambers's work exasperates, because we feel that he might so easily have made it better."[2] The career of Robert W. Chambers—whether we consider only his fantastic writing or his output as a whole—is the sad tale of a man who, starting with a vivid and distinctive imagination and a seemingly natural gift for putting words to paper, discovered popularity too quickly and devoted the rest of his life to catering to popular whim. The best of Chambers' work can almost be measured by its very lack of popularity.

Of Chambers' life we know little. Born in Brooklyn on May 26, 1865, he entered the Art Students' League around the age of twenty, where the artist Charles Dana Gibson was his fellow-student. From 1886 to 1893 he studied art in Paris, at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and at Julian's, and his work was displayed at the Salon as early as 1889. Returning to New York, he succeeded in selling his illustrations to *Life*, *Truth*, and *Vogue* ("the three most frivolous and ephemeral publications of any commercial standing that New York has ever known," as John Curtis Underwood[3] termed it), but for reasons still not entirely clear turned to writing and produced his first "novel," *In the Quarter* (1894), really a series of loosely connected character sketches of artist life in Paris. C. C. Baldwin[4] suggested that Chambers was inspired "to make use of his Latin Quarter experiences" by Henri Murger's *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* (1851; the novel upon which Puccini's *La Bohème* is based), and this may be right; although there is no way to ascertain whether it was so specific a literary influence as this, since Lovecraft in *Supernatural Horror in Literature* makes note of Chambers' "somewhat trivial and affected cultivation of the Gallic studio atmosphere made popular by Du Maurier's *Trilby*." That Chambers was not, in any case, sincerely interested in capturing his own experiences is testified by the fact that he completely dropped the "Gallic studio atmosphere" after *The Mystery of Choice* (1897), presumably because it no longer proved popular. With *The King in Yellow* (1895) Chambers' career as a writer was established—not because he had felt himself a born writer but because that collection of short stories was (probably in spite rather than because of the horror tales contained in it) successful. Chambers had somehow caught the public eye; he knew what the public wanted and gave it to them.

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[1] H. P. Lovecraft to Clark Ashton Smith, 24 June 1927; *Selected Letters II* (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1968), p. 148.

[2] Frederic Taber Cooper, "Robert W. Chambers," in *Some American Story Tellers* (New York: Henry Holt, 1911), p. 81.

[3] "Robert W. Chambers and Commercialism," in *Literature and Insurgency: Ten Studies in Racial Evolution* (New York: Mitchell and Kennerley, 1914), pp. 447-80.

[4] "Robert W. Chambers," in *The Men Who Make Our Novels*, rev. ed., as by "George Gordon" (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1924), p. 92.

Although from time to time he returned to fantasy, Chambers never did so with the gripping and almost nightmarish intensity of *The King in Yellow*; nor did he ever again attempt a sincere and almost scathing depiction of the hollowness of American social and intellectual life as he did in the unsuccessful novel *Outsiders* (1898), which alone of his works may be of interest to the social historian. Instead, he wrote novels and tales which, while superficially dealing with a wide range of topics—the Franco-Prussian War; the American Revolution; modern New York society; the Civil War—all contained an unending procession of pompous and dim-witted fellows (usually of independent means and attemptedly cynical temperament) all falling in love at the least provocation with an equally endless parade of simpering and virtuous women who, although capable of blushing instantly at the slightest suggestions of impropriety, nevertheless give themselves body and soul to their male pursuers after what proves to be a merely token resistance. Some passages in Chambers' works would probably have been considered salacious at the time of their writing, and the only fitting modern parallels are the Harlequin romances of today. It is doubtful whether any of Chambers' work would serve even as raw material for historical or sociological analysis of the period, since even in his own day Chambers was castigated for producing wooden and unrealistic characters; of his females in particular F. T. Cooper remarked: "They are all of them what men like to think women to be, rather than the actual women themselves." It is not, then, surprising that nearly the whole of Chambers' output—of which I have counted eighty-seven volumes, juvenile books on nature, and even an opera libretto—has lapsed into obscurity and has even yet to be resurrected by industrious academics always on the lookout for new dissertation topics.

There is not much to tell of Chambers' later life. At least two of his novels reached official best-seller status—*The Fighting Chance* (1906) and *The Younger Set* (1907), both selling some 200,000 copies—and Chambers settled into a luxurious and elegantly furnished mansion in Broadalbin, in upstate New York. Like Lord Dunsany, Chambers liked the "great outdoors," and was an ardent hunter and fisherman. He collected butterflies, Oriental rugs and vases, and—if the photograph of his study printed in Rupert Hughes' laudatory sketch of Chambers in *Cosmopolitan* is any guide[5]—he was in no small way a bibliophile. He died, presumably in comfort and peace, on December 16, 1933.

Of the pleasantness of Chambers' character there seems no doubt: Hughes unhesitatingly said that "Bob Chambers is the salt of the earth," and Joyce Kilmer's interview with him in 1917[6] reveals him to be genial, completely lacking in the arrogance of success, and even fairly perceptive about writing and writers; his concluding advice to the would-be author ("Let him not take himself too seriously!") is surely a

[5] Rupert Hughes, "The Art of Robert W. Chambers," Cosmopolitan 65 (June 1918): pp. 80-81, 116.

[6] "What Is Genius? Robert W. Chambers," in his *Literature in the Making* (New York & London: Harper, 1917), pp. 75-85.

reference to himself. It is, however, ironic that Chambers' very popularity drove each of his works into obscurity as its successor emerged; and so early as 1927 August Derleth complained in a letter to H. P. Lovecraft[7] that *The King in Yellow*—the most widely reprinted of Chambers' works both during and after his lifetime—was becoming difficult of access.

Chambers' fantastic writing is limited principally to five volumes—*The King in Yellow* (1895), *The Mystery of Choice* (1897), *In Search of the Unknown* (1904), *Police!!!* (1915), and the novel *The Slayer of Souls* (1920)—while several ancillary volumes contain weird matter in lesser degrees—*The Maker of Moons* (1896), *The Tracer of Lost Persons* (1906), and *The Tree of Heaven* (1907). This wide scattering of his fantastic writing shows that Chambers never considered himself a fantaisiste in the tradition of Poe and Bierce (although he was influenced by both), but seems to have written fantasy whenever the mood struck him. It is, of course, to be noted that three of the eight works listed date to Chambers' very early period; and future generations of fantasy readers have confirmed C. C. Baldwin's remark on Chambers' output: "Had I my choice I'd take the first three or four [of his books] and let the rest go hang."[8]

The inspiration for *The King in Yellow*—a collection of short stories of which only the first six are fantastic, and of these the first four are loosely interrelated—is, however, sufficiently obvious. Chambers must have read Ambrose Bierce's edition of 1892, *In the Midst of Life*[9]—shortly after his return to America from France, for he adopts certain cryptic allusions and names coined in some of Bierce's tales and appropriates them for his own. The focus of these first four tales in *The King in Yellow* is a mysterious drama (apparently in two acts) called *The King in Yellow*, which incites a peculiar fear and desperation upon reading. Chambers' descriptions of this odd volume may rank as some of his finest moments:

> This is the thing that troubles me, for I cannot forget Carcosa where black stars hang in the heavens; where the shadows of men's thoughts lengthen in the afternoon, when the twin suns sink into the Lake of Hali; and my mind will bear forever the memory of the Pallid Mask. I pray God will curse the writer, as the writer has cursed the world with this beautiful, stupendous creation, terrible in its simplicity, irresistible in its truth—a world which now trembles before the King in Yellow. ("The Repairer of Reputations")

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[7] See Lovecraft to Derleth, 6 May 1927 and 16 May 1927; mss., State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

[8] Baldwin, p. 90.

[9] The two stories by Bierce which centrally influenced Chambers—"Haïta the Shepherd" and "An Inhabitant of Carcosa"—were originally published in *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891), but in later editions were removed and transferred to the collection *Can Such Things Be?*, whose original edition (1893) did not contain them, hence could not have been the volume that influenced Chambers. Since, however, it is these later editions which have subsequently been reprinted, the two tales can now be found in modern editions of *Can Such Things Be?* (e.g. Citadel Press, 1974).

It has, however, not been generally noticed that Chambers has apparently willfully altered the components he derived from Bierce, and it is in any case not clear whether the Bierce influence really extends beyond these borrowed names. Bierce indeed created Carcosa, which he describes in "An Inhabitant of Carcosa" as some great city of the distant past. Chambers maintains this notion, but in Bierce Hali was simply a prophet who is "quoted" as the epigraphs for the tales "The Death of Halpin Frayser" and "An Inhabitant of Carcosa." Finally, Chambers borrows the term "Hastur" from Bierce; but whereas Bierce imagined Hastur as a god of the shepherds (see Haïta the Shepherd"), Chambers regards Hastur either as a place or as a person. In "The Repairer of Reputations" Chambers creates another mythical book, *The Imperial Dynasty of America* (it is never again cited in later works), and cites the beginning of it: "Then from Carcosa, the Hyades, Hastur, and Aldebaran . . ." This itself seems to be derived from a sentence in Bierce's "Inhabitant of Carcosa": "I saw through a sudden rift in the clouds Aldebaran and the Hyades!" But in "The Demoiselle d'Ys" Hastur becomes one of the demoiselle's companions. (It is to be noted that Lovecraft, when mentioning such things as Carcosa, the Lake of Hali, and the like in his own tales, was consciously following Chambers, although he knew full well the Biercian origin of these terms. His one mention of "Hastur" in "The Whisperer in Darkness" is entirely inconclusive, and it seems to me rather irresponsible of August Derleth to elevate this bare citation into one of the major gods of the "Cthulhu Mythos".)

From the first four stories in *The King in Yellow* we learn a few more details about the contents of Chambers' mythical play: there are at least three characters, Cassilda, Camilla, and the King in Yellow himself; aside from places such as Hastur and the Lake of Hali, we learn of regions called Demhe, Yhtill, and Alar (the last also from Bierce); finally, there are other details such as the Pallid Mask and the Yellow Sign. It is very obvious that Chambers intended to leave these citations vague and unexplained; he wished merely to provide dim hints as to the possible worlds of horror and awe to which his mythical book was a guide. Although in "The Silent Land" (in *The Maker of Moons*) Chambers twice makes mention of a "King in Carcosa," he never develops this "King in Yellow mythology" elsewhere.

The tales in *The King in Yellow* differ widely in tone, flavour, and quality. The first, "The Repairer of Reputations," is a bizarre tale of the future (its setting is New York in 1920) in which Chambers, aside from oddly predicting a general European war, imagines a quasi-utopia with euthanasia chambers for those who wish to slough off the burden of existence, Chicago and New York rising "white and imperial" in a new age of architecture wherein the "horrors" of Victorian design are repudiated, and things of this sort. Nevertheless, the tale cannot be called science fiction (on which see further below), since the futuristic setting does not in the end have any role in the story line, which concerns a demented young man who imagines that he is the King in Yellow and that his cousin is vying for the throne. Such a bald description cannot begin to convey the otherworldly, nightmarish quality of the tale, where the unexplained elements of Chambers' "King in Yellow mythology," along with a prose style bordering upon the extravagant and an intentionally chaotic exposition, create an atmosphere of chilling horror. "The Mask," in contrast, is an exquisitely beautiful tale set in France concerning a sculptor who has discovered a fluid capable of petrifying any plant or animal such that it resembles the finest marble. Several portions of the narration, especially toward the end, are pure poetry.

"The Yellow Sign" is generally considered to be the best tale in *The King in Yellow*, and deals horrifyingly with the nameless fate of an artist who has found the Yellow Sign. Lovecraft in *Supernatural Horror in Literature* has well described the loathsome hearse-driver who is a harbinger for the narrator's death—a soft, pudgy, wormlike creature who has one of his fingers torn off in a tussle and who, when found in the artist's studio at the end, is pronounced to have been dead for months. Finally, "The Demoiselle d'Ys," in spite of its inclusion of Hastur as a minor character, is not part of the "King in Yellow mythology," but is another hauntingly beautiful tale about a man who is supernaturally transplanted into the mediaeval age while hunting in the Breton countryside and falls in love with a lovely huntress three centuries dead. The rest of *The King in Yellow* is followed by several gripping tales (not included here) dealing with the Franco-Prussian war.

The Mystery of Choice (1897) is an undeservedly forgotten collection, and—in its more refined and controlled prose style, greater unity of theme, and exquisite pathos—ranks close to *The King in Yellow* in quality. The first five stories are linked by a common setting—Brittany—and some recurring characters; and although the first ("The Purple Emperor") is a rather amusing parody on the detective story, the rest of the collection contains fine tales of fantasy and even science fiction. Here again Chambers can, when he chooses, create moments of heartrending exquisiteness, and his powers of description are unexcelled:

> Then the daily repeated miracle of the coming of dawn was wrought before our eyes. The heavens glowed in rainbow tints; the shredded mist rising along the river was touched with purple and gold, and acres of meadow and pasture dripped precious stones. Shreds of the fading night-mist drifted among the tree tops, now tipped with fire, while in the forest depths faint sparkles came from some lost ray of morning light falling on wet leaves. Then of a sudden up shot the sun, and against it, black and gigantic, a peasant towered, leaning upon his spade. ("The White Shadow")

This is the art not only of the painter but of the etcher or engraver, and holds us breathless while it lasts.

In *In Search of the Unknown* (1904) Chambers begins to take another tack—the mingling of weirdness, humour, and romance—and readers must judge for themselves how felicitous this union is. His conceptions are as fertile as ever (we are here concerned with a series of tales depicting successive searches for lost species of animals, including a loathsome half-man and half-amphibian called "the harbor-master," a group of invisible creatures apparently in the shape of beautiful women, and the like), but in every tale the narrator attempts to flirt with a pretty girl but ultimately loses her at the last moment to some rival. Chambers reprinted "The Man at the Next Table" (from *The Maker of Moons*) and "A Matter of Interest"(from *The*

Mystery of Choice) into this work; a work which, though labelled a novel, is in fact a string of tales (actually published separately in journals) stitched together into a continuous narrative. Indeed, so many of Chambers' "novels" are of this sort that few can be termed other than episodic. A sequel to this volume is *Police!!!* (1915), a collection of tales where further searches are made into lost species—including mammoths in the glaciers of Canada, a group of "cave-ladies" in the Everglades, and the like. This book places still greater emphasis on humour than its predecessor, and several of the tales are quite amusing; but there also seems to be a slight decline in Chambers' fertility of invention: the amphibian man in "The Third Eye" too closely resembles the harbor-master, while in "Un Peu d'Amour" we encounter an irascible character very obviously reminiscent of a similar character in the first segment of *In Search of the Unknown*. But even here there are some gripping moments: "Un Peu d'Amour" presents some horrifying glimpses of a gigantic worm burrowing beneath the fields of upstate New York, while another tale ("The Ladies of the Lake") discloses a school of huge minnows the size of Pullman cars.

The Tracer of Lost Persons (1906) is another episodic novel, somewhat more unified than many of Chambers' others. Most of the tales are somewhat flippant accounts of a mysterious gentleman, Westrel Keen, who assists young men in finding their true loves; but one haunting episode about the resurrection of an Egyptian woman suspended in a state of hypnosis for thousands of years is so remarkable that I have chosen to include it here. *The Tree of Heaven* (1907) is similarly not exclusively fantastic, but contains some very fine moments. The construction of the "novel" is ingenious: at the outset an odd mystic utters prophecies to a group of his friends, and the subsequent episodes are concerned with their fulfillment. For once the love-element is not extrinsic to the plot, and in several of these tales love is simply given a supernatural dimension which creates a profundity not often found in Chambers; even the non-fantastic romantic tales are handled with a seriousness and depth completely absent in other of Chambers' works. The superb atmosphere of delicate pathos and dream-fantasy maintained in some of these tales may place this volume only behind *The King in Yellow* and *The Mystery of Choice* as Chambers' finest. The various "chapters" in fact appeared previously as short stories: "The Carpet of Belshazzar" (as "The Tree of Heaven") in *Harper's Weekly* (December 10, 1904); "The Sign of Venus" in *Harper's* (December 1903); "The Case of Mr. Helmer" in *Harper's* (October 1904); and "The Bridal Pair" in *Harper's* (December 1902). Probably the other six stories in this volume were also published in magazines, but I have not located their appearances.

With *The Slayer of Souls* (1920), however, Chambers reaches the nadir of his career. (The work is not included here because it is an actual novel and not a succession of short stories.) Even if we could swallow the appallingly tasteless premise—that "Anarchists, terrorists, Bolshevists, Reds of all shades and degrees, are now believed to represent in modern times" the descendants of the devil-worshipping Yezidi sect of inner Asia, which is poisoning the minds of misguided leftists and labour unionists for the overthrow of good and establishment of evil, whatever that means—there is no escaping the tedium of the whole work, which is concerned with the efforts of the U.S. Secret Service, along with a young woman who, although having lived for years with these evil Chinese, has now defected and converted to Christianity, to hunt down the eight leading figures of the sect and exterminate them. This happens with mechanical regularity, and it is no surprise that civilisation is saved in the end for God-fearing Americans. The novel—an elaboration of the title story of *The Maker of Moons* (1896), although that tale is handled far better and contains some delicate moments of shimmering fantasy—is further crippled by a ponderous and entirely humourless style, and with characters so moronic that they cannot reconcile themselves to the supernatural even after repeated exposure to it. And the crowning absurdity is that the origin of all these evils is a "black planet . . . not a hundred miles" from the earth! There is not a single redeeming element in this novel.

Some general remarks can now be made on Chambers' fantastic work. One of its most interesting features is a proto-science-fictional element which emerges in some works cheek by jowl with the overt supernaturalism of other tales. We have seen that "The Repairer of Reputations" is set in the future; but "The Mask" actually makes greater use of a science-fictional principle of great importance: the scientific justification for a fantastic event. Chambers never precisely explains the nature of the petrifying fluid raised in the story, but we are led to believe that it would not be beyond the bounds of chemistry to encompass it. Similarly, in "A Matter of Interest" elaborate attempts are made at the outset to establish the veracity and accuracy of the narrative, which concerns the discovery of the last living dinosaur (the "thermosaurus"). Other segments of *In Search of the Unknown* are even more emphatic on the point, and one of the characters vigorously denies the supernatural character of the harbor-master: "'I don't think that the harbor-master is a spirit or a sprite or a hobgoblin, or any sort of damned rot. Neither do I believe it to be an optical illusion.'" Less scientific justification is presented for the creatures in *Police!!!*, but even here few strain credulity beyond the breaking-point. Even *The Slayer of Souls* enunciates the principle: "'We're up against something absolutely new. Of course, it isn't magic. It can, of course be explained by natural laws about which we happen to know nothing at present.'"[10] Unfortunately, in this case little effort is made to coordinate the bizarre events into a plausibly scientific framework.

The detective element in Chambers emerges in such parodies as "The Purple Emperor" and "The Eggs of the Silver Moon" (in *Police!!!*), but most concentratedly in the episodic novel *The Tracer of Lost Persons*. The central character is an enigmatic and seemingly omniscient figure who presents himself much in the model of Sherlock Holmes; although perhaps the parallel to Poe's C. Auguste Dupin would be closer, since the segment of the novel involves the decoding of a cipher in hieroglyphics which appears clearly derived from "The Gold Bug".

Finally, we have had frequent occasion to remark upon interrelations between Chambers' tales. Many of the short story collections use the same characters and setting, and are not much different from his episodic novels. Interrelations between entire works exist: *The King in Yellow* derives some of its characters from *In the Quarter*; some characters in *In Search of the Unknown* return in *Police!!!*; in *The Tree of Heaven* there is passing allusion to the central character of *The Tracer of Lost Persons*. Much of this seems to have been done in a spirit of fun, and need imply no serious thematic connection.

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[10] *The Slayer of Souls* (New York: George W. Doran, 1920), pp. 173-74.

Chambers' influence on subsequent fantasy writing is difficult to judge; several leading fantaisistes of the next generation—Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, A. Merritt—professed to have been impressed with his work (especially—and almost exclusively—*The King in Yellow*), but in Lovecraft's case at any rate the influence does not seem to extend much beyond the borrowing of names from Chambers' "King in Yellow mythology"; the general "cosmic" attitude of both Lovecraft and Smith was clearly established before they ever encountered its dim adumbration in Chambers. The best of Chambers was a product of the "Yellow Nineties," and gains its power in large part by capturing the languor and pathos of that distinctive period.

Robert W. Chambers is a decidedly frustrating writer—a man for whom writing seems to have come as easily as (on a far higher level) composition seems to have come for Telemann or Mozart; who could draw literary substance from his own experiences—as a painter in France; as a hunter and fisher in New York state; as a collector of butterflies and general dabbler in science—but who marred so many of his creations with flippancy, pseudo-sophistication, and catchpenny sentimentality; whose descriptive and imaginative powers were of a high order but who was too lulled by the favour of the mob to use them consistently and effectively; who has left us some immortal tales of horror and fantasy which must be laboriously sifted out from a plethora of trash appalling in its scope. Chambers was an intellectual dilettante, and wrote whatever came to mind; we are fortunate that he now and again turned his careless and free-flowing pen to the creation of a few weird tales of transcendent beauty and horror.

—S. T. Joshi.

The King in Yellow

THE KING IN YELLOW

DEDICATED

TO

MY BROTHER

Along the shore the cloud waves break,
The twin suns sink behind the lake,
The shadows lengthen
In Carcosa.

Strange is the night where black stars rise,
And strange moons circle through the skies,
But stranger still is
Lost Carcosa.

Songs that the Hyades shall sing,
Where flap the tatters of the King,
Must die unheard in
Dim Carcosa.

Song of my soul, my voice is dead,
Die thou, unsung, as tears unshed
Shall dry and die in
Lost Carcosa.

Cassilda's Song in "The King in Yellow."
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The King in Yellow
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Book Publication 1895

The Repairer of Reputations

Ne raillons pas les fous; leur folie dur plus longtemps que la notre. ...
Voilà toute la differénce.

I

Toward the end of the year 1920 the Government of the United States had practically completed the programme, adopted during the last months of President Winthrop's administration. The country was apparently tranquil. Everybody knows how the Tariff and Labor questions were settled. The war with Germany, incident on that country's seizure of the Samoan Islands, had left no visible scars upon the republic, and the temporary occupation of Norfolk by the invading army had been forgotten in the joy over repeated naval victories and the subsequent ridiculous plight of General Von Gartenlaube's forces in the State of New Jersey. The Cuban and Hawaiian investments had paid one hundred per cent. and the territory of Samoa was well worth its cost as a coaling station. The country was in a superb state of defence. Every coast city had been well supplied with land fortifications; the army under the parental eye of the General Staff, organized according to the Prussian system, had been increased to 300,000 men with a territorial reserve of a million; and six magnificent squadrons of cruisers and battleships patrolled the six stations of the navigable seas, leaving a steam reserve amply fitted to control home waters. The gentlemen from the West had at last been constrained to acknowledge that a college for the training of diplomats was as necessary as law schools are for the training of barristers; consequently we were no longer represented abroad by incompetent patriots. The nation was prosperous. Chicago, for a moment paralyzed after a second great fire, had risen from its ruins, white and imperial, and more beautiful than the white city which had been built for its plaything in 1893. Everywhere good architecture was replacing bad, and even in New York, a sudden craving for decency had swept away a great portion of the existing horrors. Streets had been widened, properly paved and lighted, trees had been planted, squares laid out, elevated structures demolished and underground roads built to replace them. The new government buildings and barracks were fine bits of architecture, and the long system of stone quays which completely surrounded the island had been turned into parks which proved a godsend to the population. The subsidizing of the state theatre and state opera brought its own reward. The United States National Academy of Design was much like European institutions of the same kind. Nobody envied the Secretary of Fine Arts, either his cabinet position or his portfolio. The Secretary of Forestry and Game Preservation had a much easier time, thanks to the new system of National Mounted Police. We had profited well by the latest treaties with France and England; the exclusion of foreign-born Jews as a measure of national self-preservation, the settlement of the new independent Negro state of Suanee, the checking of immigration, the new laws concerning naturalization, and the gradual centralization of power in the executive all contributed to national calm and prosperity. When the Government solved the Indian problem and squadrons of Indian cavalry scouts in native costume were substituted for the pitiable organizations tacked on to the tail of skeletonized regiments by a former Secretary of War, the nation drew a long sigh of relief. When, after the colossal Congress of Religions, bigotry and intolerance were laid in their graves and kindness and charity began to draw warring sects together, many thought the millennium had arrived, at least in the new world, which after all is a world by itself.

But self-preservation is the first law, and the United States had to look on in helpless sorrow as Germany, Italy, Spain and Belgium writhed in the throes of Anarchy, while Russia, watching from the Caucasus, stooped and bound them one by one.

In the city of New York the summer of 1899 was signalized by the dismantling of the Elevated Railroads. The summer of 1900 will live in the memories of New York people for many a cycle; the Dodge Statue was removed in that year. In the following winter began that agitation for the repeal of the laws prohibiting suicide which bore its final fruit in the month of April, 1920, when the first Government Lethal Chamber was opened on Washington Square.

I had walked down that day from Dr. Archer's house on Madison Avenue, where I had been as a mere formality. Ever since that fall from my horse, four years before, I had been troubled at times with pains in the back of my head and neck, but now for months they had been absent, and the doctor sent me away that day saying there was nothing more to be cured in me. It was hardly worth his fee to be told that; I knew it myself. Still I did not begrudge him the money. What I minded was the mistake which he made at first. When they picked me up from the pavement where I lay unconscious, and somebody had mercifully sent a bullet through my horse's head, I was carried to Doctor Archer, and he, pronouncing my brain affected, placed me in his private asylum where I was obliged to endure treatment for insanity. At last he decided that I was well, and I, knowing that my mind had always been as sound as his, if not sounder, "paid my tuition" as he jokingly called it, and left. I told him, smiling, that I would get even with him for his mistake, and he laughed heartily, and asked me to call once in a while. I did so, hoping for a chance to even up accounts, but he gave me none, and I told him I would wait.

The fall from my horse had fortunately left no evil results; on the contrary it had changed my whole character for the better. From a lazy young man about town, I had become active, energetic, temperate, and above all—oh, above all else—ambitious. There was only one thing which troubled me. I laughed at my own uneasiness, and yet it troubled me.

During my convalescence I had bought and read for the first time, "The King in Yellow." I remembered after finishing the first act that it occurred to me that I had better stop. I started up and flung the book into the fireplace; the volume struck the barred grate and fell open on the hearth in the fire-light. If I had not caught a glimpse of the opening words in the second act I should never have finished it, but as I stooped to pick it up, my eyes became riveted to the open page, and with a cry of terror, or perhaps it was of joy so poignant that I suffered in every nerve, I snatched the thing out of the coals and crept to my bedroom, where I read it and reread it, and wept and laughed and trembled with a horror which at times assails me yet. This is the thing that troubles me, for I cannot forget Carcosa where black stars hang in the heavens; where the shadows of men's thoughts lengthen in the afternoon, when the twin suns sink into the Lake of Hali; and my mind will bear forever the memory of the Pallid Mask. I pray God will curse the writer, as the writer has cursed the world with this beautiful, stupendous creation, terrible in its simplicity, irresistible in its truth—a world which now trembles before the King in Yellow. When the French Government seized the translated copies which had just arrived in Paris, London, of course, became eager to read it. It is well known how the book spread like an infectious disease, from city to city, from continent to continent, barred out here, confiscated there, denounced by press and pulpit, censured even by the most advanced of literary anarchists. No definite principles had been violated in those wicked pages, no doctrine promulgated, no convictions outraged. It could not be judged by any known standard, yet, although it was acknowledged that the supreme note of art had been struck in "The King in Yellow," all felt that human nature could not bear the strain, nor thrive on words in which the essence of purest poison lurked. The very banality and innocence of the first act only allowed the blow to fall afterward with more awful effect.

It was, I remember, the 13th day of April, 1920, that the first Government Lethal Chamber was established on the south side of Washington Square, between Wooster Street and South Fifth Avenue. The block which had formerly consisted of a lot of shabby old buildings, used as cafés and restaurants for foreigners, had been acquired by the Government in the winter of 1898. The French and Italian cafés were torn down; the whole block was enclosed by a gilded iron railing, and converted into a lovely garden with lawns, flowers and fountains. In the centre of the garden stood a small, white building, severely classical in architecture, and surrounded by thickets of flowers. Six Ionic columns supported the roof, and the single door was of bronze. A splendid marble group of "The Fates" stood before the door, the work of a young American sculptor, Boris Yvain, who had died in Paris when only twenty-three years old.

The inauguration ceremonies were in progress as I crossed University Place and entered the square. I threaded my way through the silent throng of spectators, but was stopped at Fourth Street by a cordon of police. A regiment of United States lancers were drawn up in a hollow square around the Lethal Chamber. On a raised tribune facing Washington Park stood the Governor of New York, and behind him were grouped the Mayor of New York and Brooklyn, the Inspector-General of Police, the Commandant of the state troops, Colonel Livingston, military aide to the President of the United States, General Blount, commanding at Governor's Island, Major-General Hamilton, commanding the garrison of New York and Brooklyn, Admiral Buffby of the fleet in the North River, Surgeon-General Lanceford, the staff of the National Free Hospital, Senators Wyse and Franklin of New York, and the Commissioner of Public Works. The tribune was surrounded by a squadron of hussars of the National Guard.

The Governor was finishing his reply to the short speech of the Surgeon-General. I heard him say: "The laws prohibiting suicide and providing punishment for any attempt at self-destruction have been repealed. The Government has seen fit to acknowledge the right of man to end an existence which may have become intolerable to him, through physical suffering or mental despair. It is believed that the community will be benefited by the removal of such people from their midst. Since the passage of this law, the number of suicides in the United States has not increased. Now that the Government has determined to establish a Lethal Chamber in every city, town and village in the country, it remains to be seen whether or not that class of human creatures from whose desponding ranks new victims of self-destruction fall daily will accept the relief thus provided." He paused, and turned to the white Lethal Chamber. The silence in the street was absolute. "There a painless death awaits him who can no longer bear the sorrows of this life. If death is welcome let him seek it there." Then quickly turning to the military aide of the President's household, he said, "I declare the Lethal Chamber open," and again facing the vast crowd he cried in a clear voice: "Citizens of New York and of the United States of America, through me the Government declares the Lethal Chamber to be open."

The solemn hush was broken by a sharp cry of command, the squadron of hussars filed after the Governor's carriage, the lancers wheeled and formed along Fifth Avenue to wait for the commandant of the garrison, and the mounted police followed them. I left the crowd to gape and stare at the white marble Death Chamber, and, crossing South Fifth Avenue, walked along the western side of that thoroughfare to Bleecker Street. Then I turned to the right and stopped before a dingy shop which bore the sign,

HAWBERK, ARMORER

I glanced in at the doorway and Hawberk busy in his little shop at the end of the hall. He looked up, and catching sight of me cried in his deep, hearty voice, "Come in, Mr. Castaigne!" Constance, his daughter, rose to meet me as I crossed the threshold, and held out her pretty hand, but I saw the blush of disappointment on her cheeks, knew that it was another Castaigne she had expected, my cousin Louis. I smiled at her confusion and complimented her on the banner which she was embroidering from a colored plate. Old Hawberk sat riveting the worn greaves of some ancient suit of armor, and the ting! ting! ting! of his little hammer sounded pleasantly in the quaint shop. Presently he dropped his hammer, and fussed about for a moment with a tiny wrench. The soft clash of the mail sent a thrill of pleasure through me. I loved to hear the music of steel brushing against steel, the mellow shock of the mallet on thigh pieces, and the jingle of chain armor. That was the only reason I went to see Hawberk. He had never interested me personally, nor did Constance, except for the fact of her being in love with Louis. This did occupy my attention, and sometimes even kept me awake at night. But I knew in my heart that all would come right, and that I should arrange their future as I expected to arrange that of my kind doctor, John Archer. However, I should never have troubled myself about visiting them just then, had it not been, as I say, that the music of the tinkling hammer had for me this strong fascination. I would sit for hours, listening and listening, and when a stray sunbeam struck the inlaid steel, the sensation it gave me was almost too keen to endure. My eyes would become fixed, dilating with a pleasure that stretched every nerve almost to breaking, until some movement of the old armorer cut off the ray of sunlight, then, still thrilling secretly, I leaned back and listened again to the sound of the polishing rag, swish! swish! rubbing rust from the rivets.

Constance worked with the embroidery over her knees, now and then pausing to examine more closely the pattern in the colored plate from the Metropolitan Museum.

"Who is this for?" I asked.

Hawberk explained, that in addition to the treasures of armor in the Metropolitan Museum of which he had been appointed armorer, he also had charge of several collections belonging to rich amateurs. This was the missing greave of a famous suit which a client of his had traced to a little shop in Paris on the Quai d'Orsay. He, Hawberk, had negotiated for and secured the greave, and now the suit was complete. He laid down his hammer and read me the history of the suit, traced since 1450 from owner to owner until it was acquired by Thomas Stainbridge. When his superb collection was sold, this client of Hawberk's bought the suit, and since then the search for the missing greave had been pushed until it was, almost by accident, located in Paris.

"Did you continue the search so persistently without any certainty of the greave being still in existence?" I demanded.

"Of course," he replied coolly.

Then for the first time I took a personal interest in Hawberk.

"It was worth something to you," I ventured.

"No," he replied, laughing, "my pleasure in finding it was my reward."

"Have you no ambition to be rich?" I asked smiling.

"My one ambition is to be the best armorer in the world," he answered gravely.

Constance asked me if I had seen the ceremonies at the Lethal Chamber. She herself had noticed cavalry passing up Broadway that morning, and had wished to see the inauguration, but her father wanted the banner finished, and she had stayed at his request.

"Did you see your cousin, Mr. Castaigne, there?" she asked with the slightest tremor of her soft eyelashes.

"No," I replied carelessly. "Louis' regiment is manoeuvreing out in Westchester County." I rose and picked up my hat and cane.

"Are you going upstairs to see the lunatic again?" laughed old Hawberk. If Hawberk knew how I loathe that word "lunatic," he would never use it in my presence. It rouses certain feelings within me which I do not care to explain. However, I answered him quietly: "I think I shall drop in and see Mr. Wilde for a moment or two."

"Poor fellow," said Constance, with a shake of her head, "it must be hard to live alone year after year, poor, crippled and almost demented. It is very good of you, Mr. Castaigne, to visit him as often as you do."

"I think he is vicious," observed Hawberk, beginning again with his hammer. I listened to the golden tinkle on the greave plates; when he had finished I replied:

"No, he is not vicious, nor is he in the least demented. His mind is a wonder chamber, from which he can extract treasures that you and I would give years of our lives to acquire."

Hawberk laughed.

I continued a little impatiently: "He knows history as no one else could know it. Nothing, however trivial, escapes his search, and his memory is so absolute, so precise in details, that were it known in New York that such a man existed the people could not honor him enough."

"Nonsense," muttered Hawberk, searching on the floor for a fallen rivet.

"Is it nonsense," I asked, managing to suppress what I felt, "is it nonsense when he says that the tassets and cuissards of the enamelled suit of armor commonly known as the 'Prince's Emblazoned' can be found among a mass of rusty theatrical properties, broken stoves and ragpicker's refuse in a garret in Pell Street?"

Hawberk's hammer fell to the ground, but he picked it up and asked, with a great deal of calm, how I knew that the tassets and left cuissard were missing from the "Prince's Emblazoned."

"I did not know until Mr. Wilde mentioned it to me the other day. He said they were in the garret of 998 Pell Street."

"Nonsense," he cried, but I noticed his hand trembling under his leathern apron.

"Is this nonsense too?" I asked pleasantly. "Is it nonsense when Mr. Wilde continually speaks of you as the Marquis of Avonshire and of Miss Constance—"

I did not finish, for Constance had started to her feet with terror written on every feature. Hawberk looked at me and slowly smoothed his leathern apron. "That is impossible," he observed, "Mr. Wilde may know a great many things—"

"About armor, for instance, and the 'Prince's Emblazoned,'" I interposed, smiling.

"Yes," he continued, slowly, "about armor also—maybe—but he is wrong in regard to the Marquis of Avonshire, who, as you know, killed his wife's traducer years ago, and went to Australia where he did not long survive his wife."

"Mr. Wilde is wrong," murmured Constance. Her lips were blanched but her voice was sweet and calm.

"Let us agree, if you please, that in this one circumstance Mr. Wilde is wrong," I said.

II

I climbed the three dilapidated flights of stairs, which I had so often climbed before, and knocked at a small door at the end of the corridor. Mr. Wilde opened the door and I walked in.

When he had double-locked the door and pushed a heavy chest against it, he came and sat down beside me, peering up into my face with his little light-colored eyes. Half a dozen new scratches covered his nose and cheeks, and the silver wires which supported his artificial ears had become displaced. I thought I had never seen him so hideously fascinating. He had no ears.

The artificial ones, which now stood out at an angle from the fine wire, were his one weakness. They were made of wax and painted a shell pink, but the rest of his face was yellow. He might better have revelled in the luxury of some artificial fingers for his left hand, which was absolutely fingerless, but it seemed to cause him no inconvenience, and he was satisfied with his wax ears. He was very small, scarcely higher than a child of ten, but his arms were magnificently developed, and his thighs as thick as any athlete's. Still, the most remarkable thing about Mr. Wilde was that a man of his marvelous intelligence and knowledge should have such a head. It was flat and pointed, like the heads of many of those unfortunates whom people imprison in asylums for the weak-minded. Many called him insane but I knew him to be as sane as I was.

I do not deny that he was eccentric; the mania he had for keeping that cat and teasing her until she flew at his face like a demon, was certainly eccentric. I never could understand why he kept the creature, nor what pleasure he found in shutting himself up in his room with the surly, vicious beast. I remembered once, glancing up from the manuscript I was studying by the light of some tallow dips, and seeing Mr. Wilde squatting motionless on his high chair, his eyes fairly blazing with excitement, while the cat, which had risen from her place before the stove, came creeping across the floor right at him. Before I could move she flattened her belly to the ground, crouched, trembled, and sprang into his face. Howling and foaming they rolled over and over the floor, scratching and clawing, until the cat screamed and fled under the cabinet, and Mr. Wilde turned over on his back, his limbs contracting and curling up like the legs of a dying spider. He *was* eccentric.

Mr. Wilde had climbed into his high chair, and, after studying my face, picked up a dog's-eared ledger and opened it.

"Henry B. Matthews," he read, "bookkeeper with Whysot Whysot and Company, dealers in church ornaments. Called April 3d. Reputation damaged on the race-track. Known as a welcher. Reputation to be repaired by August 1st. Retainer Five Dollars." He turned the page and ran his fingerless knuckles down the closely-written columns.

"P. Greene Dusenberry, Minister of the Gospel, Fairbeach, New Jersey. Reputation damaged in the Bowery. To be repaired as soon as possible. Retainer $100."

He coughed and added, "Called, April 6th."

"Then you are not in need of money, Mr. Wilde," I inquired.

"Listen," he coughed again.

"Mrs. C. Hamilton Chester, of Chester Park, New York City. Called April 7th. Reputation damaged at Dieppe, France. To be repaired by October 1st. Retainer $500.

"Note—C. Hamilton Chester, Captain, U.S.S. *Avalanche* ordered home from South Sea Squadron October 1st."

"Well," I said, "the profession of a Repairer of Reputations is lucrative."

His colorless eyes sought mine. "I only wanted to demonstrate that I was correct. You said it was impossible to succeed as a Repairer of Reputations; that even if I did succeed in certain cases it would cost me more than I would gain by it. To-day I have five hundred men in my employ, who are poorly paid, but who pursue the work with an enthusiasm which possibly may be born of fear. These men enter every shade and grade of society; some even are pillars of the most exclusive social temples; others are the prop and pride of the financial world; still others, hold undisputed sway among the 'Fancy and the Talent.' I choose them at my leisure from those who reply to my advertisements. It is easy enough, they are all cowards. I could treble the number in twenty days if I wished. So you see, those who have in their keeping the reputations of their fellow-citizens, *I* have in my pay."

"They may turn on you," I suggested.

He rubbed his thumb over his cropped ears, and adjusted the wax substitutes. "I think not," he murmured thoughtfully, "I seldom have to apply the whip, and then only once. Besides, they like their wages."

"How do you apply the whip?" I demanded.

His face for a moment was awful to look upon. His eyes dwindled to a pair of green sparks.

"I invite them to come and have a little chat with me," he said in a soft voice.

A knock at the door interrupted him, and his face resumed its amiable expression.

"Who is it?" he inquired.

"Mr. Steylette," was the answer.

"Come to-morrow," replied Mr. Wilde.

"Impossible," began the other, but was silenced by a sort of bark from Mr. Wilde.

"Come to-morrow," he repeated.

We heard somebody move away from the door and turn the corner by the stairway.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"Arnold Steylette, Owner and Editor in Chief of the great New York daily."

He drummed on the ledger with his fingerless hand adding: "I pay him very badly, but he thinks it a good bargain."

"Arnold Steylette!" I repeated amazed.

"Yes," said Mr. Wilde with a self-satisfied cough.

The cat, which had entered the room as he spoke, hesitated, looked up at him and snarled. He climbed down from the chair and squatting on the floor, took the creature into his arms and caressed her. The cat ceased snarling and presently began a loud purring which seemed to increase in timbre as he stroked her.

"Where are the notes?" I asked. He pointed to the table, and for the hundredth time I picked up the bundle of manuscript entitled

THE IMPERIAL DYNASTY OF AMERICA

One by one I studied the well-worn pages, worn only by my own handling, and although I knew all by heart, from the beginning, "When from Carcosa, the Hyades, Hastur, and Aldebaran," to "Castaigne, Louis de Calvados, born December 19th, 1877," I read it with an eager rapt attention, pausing to repeat parts of it aloud, and dwelling especially on "Hildred de Calvados, only son of Hildred Castaigne and Edythe Landes Castaigne, first in success," etc., etc.

When I finished, Mr. Wilde nodded and coughed.

"Speaking of your legitimate ambition," he said, "how do Constance and Louis get along?"

"She loves him," I replied simply.

The cat on his knee suddenly turned and struck at his eyes, and he flung her off and climbed on to the chair opposite me.

"And Doctor Archer! But that's a matter you can settle any time you wish," he added.

"Yes," I replied, "Doctor Archer can wait, but it is time I saw my cousin Louis."

"It is time," he repeated. Then he took another ledger from the table and ran over the leaves rapidly.

"We are now in communication with ten thousand men," he muttered. "We can count on one hundred thousand within the first twenty-eight hours, and in forty-eight hours the state will rise *en masse*. The country follows the state, and the portion that will not, I mean California and the Northwest, might better never have been inhabited. I shall not send them the Yellow Sign."

The blood rushed to my head, but I only answered, "A new broom sweeps clean."

"The ambition of Caesar and of Napoleon pales before that which could not rest until it had seized the minds of men and controlled even their unborn thoughts," said Mr. Wilde.

"You are speaking of the King in Yellow," I groaned with a shudder.

"He is a king whom emperors have served."

"I am content to serve him," I replied.

Mr. Wilde sat rubbing his ears with his crippled hand. "Perhaps Constance does not love him," he suggested.

I started to reply, but a sudden burst of military music from the street below drowned my voice. The twentieth dragoon regiment, formerly in garrison at Mount St. Vincent, was returning from the manoeuvres in Westchester County, to its new barracks on East Washington Square. It was my cousin's regiment. They were a fine lot of fellows, in their pale-blue, tight-fitting jackets, jaunty busbys and white riding breeches with the double yellow stripe, into which their limbs seemed molded. Every other squadron was armed with lances, from the metal points of which fluttered yellow and white pennons. The band passed, playing the regimental march, then came the colonel and staff, the horses crowding and trampling, while their heads bobbed in unison, and the pennons fluttered from their lance points. The troopers, who rode with the beautiful English seat, looked brown as berries from their bloodless campaign among the farms of Westchester, and the music of their sabres against the stirrups, and the jingle of spurs and carbines was delightful to me. I saw Louis riding with his squadron. He was as handsome an officer as I have ever seen. Mr. Wilde, who had mounted a chair by the window, saw him too, but said nothing. Louis turned and looked straight at Hawberk's shop as he passed, and I could see the flush on his brown cheeks. I think Constance must have been at the window. When the last troopers had clattered by, and the last pennons vanished into South Fifth Avenue, Mr. Wilde clambered out of his chair and dragged the chest away from the door.

"Yes," he said, "it is time that you saw your cousin Louis."

He unlocked the door and I picked up my hat and stick and stepped into the corridor. The stairs were dark. Groping about, I set my foot on something soft, which snarled and spit, and I aimed a murderous blow at the cat, but my cane shivered to splinters against the balustrade, and the beast scurried back into Mr. Wilde's room.

Passing Hawberk's door again I saw him still at work on the armor, but I did not stop, and stepping out into Bleecker Street, I followed it to Wooster, skirted the grounds of the Lethal Chamber, and crossing Washington Park went straight to my rooms in the Benedick. Here I lunched comfortably, read the *Herald* and the *Meteor*, and finally went to the steel safe in my bedroom and set the time combination. The three and three-quarter minutes which it is necessary to wait, while the time lock is opening, are to me golden moments. From the instant I set the combination to the moment when I grasp the knobs and swing back the solid steel doors, I live in an ecstasy of expectation. Those moments must be like the moments passed in Paradise. I know what I am to find at the end of the time limit. I know what the massive safe holds secure for me, for me alone, and the exquisite pleasure of waiting is hardly enhanced when the safe opens and I lift, from its velvet crown, a diadem of purest gold, blazing with diamonds. I do this every day, and yet the joy of waiting and at last touching the diadem, only seems to increase as the days pass. It is a diadem fit for a King among kings, an Emperor among emperors. The King in Yellow might scorn it, but it shall be worn by his royal servant.

I held it in my arms until the alarm on the safe rang harshly, and then tenderly, proudly, I replaced it and shut the steel doors. I walked slowly back into my study, which faces Washington Square, and leaned on the window-sill. The afternoon sun poured into my windows, and a gentle breeze stirred the branches of the elms and maples in the park, now covered with buds and tender foliage. A flock of pigeons circled about the tower of the Memorial Church; sometimes alighting on the purple tiled roof, sometimes wheeling downward to the lotos fountain in front of the marble arch. The gardeners were busy with the flower beds around the fountain, and the freshly-turned earth smelled sweet and spicy. A lawn mower, drawn by a fat white horse, clinked across the green sward, and watering carts poured showers of spray over the asphalt drives. Around the statue of Peter Stuyvesant, which in 1897 had replaced the monstrosity supposed to represent Garibaldi, children played in the spring sunshine, and nurse girls wheeled elaborate baby-carriages with a reckless disregard for the pasty-faced occupants, which could probably be explained by the presence of half a dozen trim dragoon troopers languidly lolling on the benches. Through the trees, the Washington Memorial Arch glistened like silver in the sunshine, and beyond, on the eastern extremity of the square the gray stone barracks of the dragoons, and the white granite artillery stables were alive with color and motion.

I looked at the Lethal Chamber on the corner of the square opposite. A few curious people still lingered about the gilded iron railing, but inside the grounds the paths were deserted. I watched the fountains ripple and sparkle; the sparrows had already found this new bathing nook, and the basins were crowded with the dusty-feathered little things. Two or three white peacocks picked their way across the lawns, and a drab-colored pigeon sat so motionless on the arm of one of the Fates, that it seemed to be a part of the sculptured stone.

As I was turning carelessly away, a slight commotion in the group of curious loiterers around the gates attracted my attention. A young man had entered, and was advancing with nervous strides along the gravel path which leads to the bronze doors of the Lethal Chamber. He paused a moment before the Fates, and as he raised his head to those three mysterious faces, the pigeon rose from its sculptured perch, circled about for a moment and wheeled to the east. The young man pressed his hands to his face, and then with an undefinable gesture sprang up the marble steps, the bronze doors closed behind him, and half an hour later the loiterers slouched away, and the frightened pigeon returned to its perch in the arms of Fate.

I put on my hat and went out into the park for a little walk before dinner. As I crossed the central driveway a group of officers passed, and one of them called out, "Hello, Hildred," and came back to shake hands with me. It was my cousin Lou is, who stood smiling and tapping his spurred heels with his riding-whip.

"Just back from Westchester," he said; "been doing the bucolic; milk and curds, you know, dairy-maids in sunbonnets, who say 'haeow' and 'I don't think' when you tell them they are pretty. I'm nearly dead for a square meal at Delmonico's. What's the news?"

"There is none," I replied pleasantly. "I saw your regiment coming in this morning."

"Did you? I didn't see you. Where were you?"

"In Mr. Wilde's window."

"Oh hell!" he began impatiently, "that man is stark mad! I don't understand why you—"

He saw how annoyed I felt by this outburst, and begged my pardon.

"Really, old chap," he said, "I don't mean to run down a man you like, but for the life of me I can't see what the deuce you find in common with Mr. Wilde. He's not well-bred, to put it generously; he's hideously deformed; his head is the head of a criminally insane person. You know yourself he's been in an asylum—"

"So have I," I interrupted calmly.

Louis looked startled and confused for a moment, but recovered and slapped me heartily on the shoulder.

"You were completely cured," he began, but I stopped him again.

"I suppose you mean that I was simply acknowledged never to have been insane."

"Of course that—that's what I meant," he laughed.

I disliked his laugh because I knew it was forced, but I nodded gaily and asked him where he was going. Louis looked after his brother officers who had now almost reached Broadway.

"We had intended to sample a Brunswick cocktail, but to tell you the truth I was anxious for an excuse to go and see Hawberk instead. Come along, I'll make you my excuse."

We found old Hawberk, neatly attired in a fresh spring suit, standing at the door of his shop and sniffing the air.

"I had just decided to take Constance for a little stroll before dinner," he replied to the impetuous volley of questions from Louis. "We thought of walking on the park terrace along the North River."

At that moment Constance appeared and grew pale and rosy by turns as Louis bent over her small gloved fingers. I tried to excuse myself, alleging an engagement up-town, but Louis and Constance would not listen, and I saw I was expected to remain and engage old Hawberk's attention. After all it would be just as well if I kept my eye on Louis, I thought, and when they hailed a Spring Street horsecar, I got in after them and took my seat beside the armorer.

The beautiful line of parks and granite terraces overlooking the wharves along the North River, which were built in 1910 and finished in the autumn of 1917, had become one of the most popular promenades in the metropolis. They extended from the battery to 190th Street, overlooking the noble river and affording a fine view of the Jersey shore and the Highlands opposite. Cafés and restaurants were scattered here and there among the trees, and twice a week military bands from the garrison played in the kiosques on the parapets.

We sat down in the sunshine on the bench at the foot of the equestrian statue of General Sheridan. Constance tipped her sunshade to shield her eyes, and she and Louis began a murmuring conversation which was impossible to catch. Old Hawberk, leaning on his ivory-headed cane, lighted an excellent cigar, the mate to which I politely refused, and smiled at vacancy. The sun hung low above the Staten Island woods, and the bay was dyed with golden hues reflected from the sun-warmed sails of the shipping in the harbor.

Brigs, schooners, yachts, clumsy ferry-boats, their decks swarming with people, railroad transports carrying lines of brown, blue and white freight cars, stately sound steamers, *declassé* tramp steamers, coasters, dredgers, scows, and everywhere pervading the entire bay impudent little tugs puffing and whistling officiously;—these were the crafts which churned the sunlit waters as far as the eye could reach. In calm contrast to the hurry of sailing vessel and steamer a silent fleet of white warships lay motionless in midstream.

Constance's merry laugh aroused me from my reverie.

"What *are* you staring at?" she inquired.

"Nothing—the fleet," I smiled.

Then Louis told us what the vessels were, pointing out each by its relative position to the old Red Fort on Governor's Island.

"That little cigar-shaped thing is a torpedo boat," he explained; "there are four more lying close together. They are the *Tarpon*, the *Falcon*, the *Sea Fox* and the *Octopus*. The gun-boats just above are the *Princeton*, the *Champlain*, the *Still Water* and the *Erie*. Next to them lie the cruisers *Farragut* and *Los Angeles*, and above them the battleships *California* and *Dakota*, and the *Washington* which is the flag-ship. Those two squatty-looking chunks of metal which are anchored there off Castle William are the double-turreted monitors *Terrible* and *Magnificent*; behind them lies the ram, *Osceola*."

Constance looked at him with deep approval in her beautiful eyes. "What loads of things you know for a soldier," she said, and we all joined in the laugh which followed.

Presently Louis rose with a nod to us and offered his arm to Constance, and they strolled away along the river wall. Hawberk watched them for a moment and then turned to me.

"Mr. Wilde was right," he said. "I have found the missing tassets and left cuissard of the 'Prince's Emblazoned,' in a vile old junk garret in Pell Street."

"998?" I inquired, with a smile.

"Yes."

"Mr. Wilde is a very intelligent man," I observed.

"I want to give him the credit of this most important discovery," continued Hawberk. "And I intend it shall be known that he is entitled to the fame of it."

"He won't thank you for that," I answered sharply; "please say nothing about it."

"Do you know what it is worth?" said Hawberk.

"No, fifty dollars, perhaps."

"It is valued at five hundred, but the owner of the 'Prince's Emblazoned' will give two thousand dollars to the person who completes his suit; that reward also belongs to Mr. Wilde."

"He doesn't want it! He refuses it!" I answered angrily. "What do you know about Mr. Wilde? He doesn't need the money. He is rich—or will be—richer than any living man except myself. What will we care for money then—what will we care, he and I, when—when—"

"When what?" demanded Hawberk, astonished.

"You will see," I replied, on my guard again.

He looked at me narrowly, much as Doctor Archer used to, and I knew he thought I was mentally unsound. Perhaps it was fortunate for him that he did not use the word lunatic just then.

"No," I replied to his unspoken thought, "I am not mentally weak; my mind is as healthy as Mr. Wilde's. I do not care to explain just yet what I have on hand, but it is an investment which will pay more than mere gold, silver and precious stones. It will secure the happiness and prosperity of a continent—yes, a hemisphere!"

"Oh," said Hawberk.

"And eventually," I continued more quietly, "it will secure the happiness of the whole world."

"And incidentally your own happiness and prosperity as well as Mr. Wilde's?"

"Exactly," I smiled. But I could have throttled him for taking that tone.

He looked at me in silence for a while and then said very gently, "Why don't you give up your books and studies, Mr. Castaigne, and take a tramp among the mountains somewhere or other? You used to be fond of fishing. Take a cast or two at the trout in the Rangeleys."

"I don't care for fishing any more," I answered, without a shade of annoyance in my voice.

"You used to be fond of everything," he continued; "athletics, yachting, shooting, riding—"

"I have never cared to ride since my fall," I said quietly.

"Ah, yes, your fall," he repeated, looking away from me.

I thought this nonsense had gone far enough, so I turned the conversation back to Mr. Wilde; but he was scanning my face again in a manner highly offensive to me.

"Mr. Wilde," he repeated, "do you know what he did this afternoon? He came down stairs and nailed a sign over the hall door next to mine; it read:

MR. WILDE,
REPAIRER OF REPUTATIONS,
3d Bell.

Do you know what a Repairer of Reputations can be?"

"I do," I replied, suppressing the rage within.

"Oh," he said again.

Louis and Constance came strolling by and stopped to ask if we would join them. Hawberk looked at his watch. At the same moment a puff of smoke shot from the casemates of Castle William, and the boom of the sunset gun rolled across the water and was re-echoed from the Highlands opposite. The flag came running down from the flag-pole, the bugles sounded on the white decks of the warships, and the first electric light sparkled out from the Jersey shore.

As I turned into the city with Hawberk I heard Constance murmur something to Louis which I did not understand; but Louis whispered, "My darling," in reply; and again, walking ahead with Hawberk through the square I heard a murmur of "sweetheart," and "my own Constance," and I knew the time had nearly arrived when I should speak of important matters with my cousin Louis.

III

One morning early in May I stood before the steel safe in my bedroom, trying on the golden jewelled crown. The diamonds flashed fire as I turned to the mirror, and the heavy beaten gold burned like a halo about my head. I remembered Camilla's agonized scream and the awful words echoing through the streets of Carcosa. They were the last lines in the first act, and I dared not think of what followed—dared not, even in the spring sunshine, there in my own room, surrounded with familiar objects, reassured by the bustle from the street and the voices of the servants in the hallway outside. For those poisoned words had dropped slowly into my heart, as death-sweat drops upon a bed-sheet and is absorbed. Trembling, I put the diadem from my head and wiped my forehead, but I thought of Hastur and of my own rightful ambition, and I remembered Mr. Wilde as I had last left him, his face all torn and bloody from the claws of that devil's creature, and what he said—ah, what he said! The alarm bell in the safe began to whirr harshly, and I knew my time was up; but I would not heed it, and replacing the flashing circlet upon my head I turned defiantly to the mirror. I stood for a long time absorbed in the changing expression of my own eyes. The mirror reflected a face which was like my own, but whiter, and so thin that I hardly recognized it. And all the time I kept repeating between my clenched teeth, "The day has come! the day has come!" while the alarm in the safe whirred and clamored, and the diamonds sparked and flamed above my brow. I heard a door open but did not heed it. It was only when I saw two faces in the mirror;—it was only when another face rose over my shoulder, and two other eyes met mine. I wheeled like a flash and seized a long knife from the dressing-table, and my cousin sprang back very pale, crying: "Hildred! for God's sake!" then as my hand fell, he said: "It is I, Louis, don't you know me?" I stood silent. I could not have spoken for my life. He walked up to me and took the knife from my hand.

"What is all this?" he inquired, in a gentle voice. "Are you ill?"

"No," I replied. But I doubt if he heard me.

"Come, come, old fellow," he cried, "take off that brass crown and toddle into the study. Are you going to a masquerade? What's all this theatrical tinsel anyway?"

I was glad he thought the crown was made of brass and paste, yet I didn't like him any the better for thinking so. I let him take it from my hand, knowing it was best to humor him. He tossed the splendid diadem in the air, and catching it, turned to me smiling.

"It's dear at fifty cents," he said. "What's it for?"

I did not answer, but took the circlet from his hands, and placing it in the safe shut the massive steel door. The alarm ceased its infernal din at once. He watched me curiously, but did not seem to notice the sudden ceasing of the alarm. He did, however, speak of the safe as a biscuit box. Fearing lest he might examine the combination I led the way into the study. Louis threw himself on the sofa and flicked at flies with his eternal riding-whip. He wore his fatigue uniform with the braided jacket and jaunty cap, and I noticed that his riding-boots were all splashed with red mud.

"Where have you been?" I inquired.

"Jumping mud creeks in Jersey," he said. "I haven't had time to change yet; I was rather in a hurry to see you. Haven't you got a glass of something? I'm dead tired; been in the saddle twenty-four hours."

I gave him some brandy from my medicinal store, which he drank with a grimace.

"Damned bad stuff," he observed. "I'll give you an address where they sell brandy that is brandy."

"It's good enough for my needs," I said indifferently. "I used it to rub my chest with." He stared and flicked at another fly.

"See here, old fellow," he began, "I've got something to suggest to you. It's four years now that you've shut yourself up in here like an owl, never going anywhere, never taking any healthy exercise, never doing a damned thing but poring over those books up there on the mantelpiece."

He glanced along the row of shelves. "Napoleon, Napoleon, Napoleon!" he read. "For heaven sake, have you nothing but Napoleons there?"

"I wish they were bound in gold," I said. "But wait, yes, there is another book, 'The King in Yellow.'" I looked him steadily in the eye.

"Have you never read it?" I asked.

"I? No, thank God! I don't want to be driven crazy."

I saw he regretted his speech as soon as he had uttered it. There is only one word which I loathe more than I do lunatic and that word is crazy. But I controlled myself and asked him why he thought "The King in Yellow" dangerous.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, hastily. "I only remember the excitement it created and the denunciations from pulpit and press. I believe the author shot himself after bringing forth this monstrosity, didn't he?"

"I understand he is still alive," I answered.

"That's probably true," he muttered; "bullets couldn't kill a fiend like that."

"It is a book of great truths," I said.

"Yes," he replied, "Of 'truths' which send men frantic and blast their lives. I don't care if the thing is, as they say, the very supreme essence of art. It's a crime to have written it and I for one shall never open its pages."

"Is that what you have come to tell me?" I asked.

"No," he said, "I came to tell you that I am going to be married."

I believe for a moment my heart ceased to beat, but kept my eyes on his face.

"Yes," he continued, smiling happily, "married to the sweetest girl on earth."

"Constance Hawberk," I said mechanically.

"How did you know?" he cried, astonished. "I didn't know it myself until that evening last April, when we strolled down to the embankment before dinner."

"When is it to be?" I asked.

"It was to have been next September, but an hour ago a despatch came ordering our regiment to the Presidio, San Francisco. We leave at noon to-morrow. To-morrow," he repeated. "Just think, Hildred, to-morrow I shall be the happiest fellow that ever drew breath in this jolly world, for Constance will go with me."

I offered him my hand in congratulation, and he seized and shook it like the good-natured fool he was—or pretended to be.

"I am going to get my squadron as a wedding present," he rattled on. "Captain and Mrs. Louis Castaigne, eh, Hildred?"

Then he told me where it was to be and who were to be there, and made me promise to come and be best man. I set my teeth and listened to his boyish chatter without showing what I felt, but—

I was getting to the limit of my endurance, and when he jumped up, and, switching his spurs till they jingled, said he must go, I did not detain him.

"There's one thing I want to ask of you," I said quietly.

"Out with it, it's promised," he laughed.

"I want you to meet me for a quarter of an hour's talk to-night."

"Of course, if you wish," he said, somewhat puzzled. "Where?"

"Anywhere, in the park there."

"What time, Hildred?"

"Midnight."

"What in the name of—" he began, but checked himself and laughingly assented. I watched him go down the stairs and hurry away, his sabre banging at every stride. He turned into Bleecker Street, and I knew he was going to see Constance. I gave him ten minutes to disappear and then followed in his footsteps, taking with me the jewelled crown and the silken robe embroidered with the Yellow Sign. When I turned into Bleecker Street, and entered the doorway which bore the sign,

MR. WILDE,
REPAIRER OF REPUTATIONS,
3d Bell,

I saw old Hawberk moving about in his shop, and imagined I heard Constance's voice in the parlor; but I avoided them both and hurried up the trembling stairways to Mr. Wilde's apartment. I knocked, and entered without ceremony. Mr. Wilde lay groaning on the floor, his face covered with blood, his clothes torn to shreds. Drops of blood were scattered about over the carpet, which had also been ripped and frayed in the evidently recent struggle.

"It's that cursed cat," he said, ceasing his groans, and turning his colorless eyes to me; "she attacked me while I was asleep. I believe she will kill me yet."

This was too much, so I went into the kitchen and seizing a hatchet from the pantry, started to find the infernal beast and settle her then and there. My search was fruitless, and after a while I gave it up and came back to find Mr. Wilde squatting on his high chair by the table. He had washed his face and changed his clothes. The great furrows which the cat's claws had ploughed up in his face he had filled with collodion, and a rag hid the wound in his throat. I told him I should kill the cat when I came across her, but he only shook his head and turned to the open ledger before him. He read name after name of the people who had come to him in regard to their reputation, and the sums he had amassed were startling.

"I put the screws on now and then," he explained.

"One day or other some of these people will assassinate you," I insisted.

"Do you think so?" he said, rubbing his mutilated ears.

It was useless to argue with him, so I took down the manuscript entitled Imperial Dynasty of America, for the last time I should ever take it down in Mr. Wilde's study. I read it through, thrilling and trembling with pleasure. When I had finished Mr. Wilde took the manuscript and, turning to the dark passage which leads from his study to his bed-chamber, called out in a loud voice, "Vance." Then for the first time, I noticed a man crouching there in the shadow. How I had overlooked him during my search for the cat, I cannot imagine.

"Vance, come in," cried Mr. Wilde.

The figure rose and crept toward us, and I shall never forget the face that he raised to mine, as the light from the window illuminated it.

"Vance, this is Mr. Castaigne," said Mr. Wilde. Before he had finished speaking, the man threw himself on the ground before the table, crying and gasping, "Oh, God! Oh, my God! Help me! Forgive me—Oh, Mr. Castaigne, keep that man away. You cannot, you cannot mean it! You are different—save me! I am broken down—I was in a madhouse and now—when all was coming right—when I had forgotten the King—the King in Yellow and—but I shall go mad again—I shall go mad—"

His voice died into a choking rattle, for Mr. Wilde had leapt on him and his right hand encircled the man's throat. When Vance fell in a heap on the floor, Mr. Wilde clambered nimbly into his chair again, and rubbing his mangled ears with the stump of his hand, turned to me and asked me for the ledger. I reached it down from the shelf and he opened it. After a moment's searching among the beautifully written pages, he coughed complacently, and pointed to the name Vance.

"Vance," he read aloud, "Osgood Oswald Vance." At the sound of his name, the man on the floor raised his head and turned a convulsed face to Mr. Wilde. His eyes were injected with blood, his lips tumefied. "Called April 28th," continued Mr. Wilde. "Occupation, cashier in the Seaforth National Bank; has served a term of forgery at Sing Sing, from whence he was transferred to the Asylum for the Criminal Insane. Pardoned by the Governor of New York, and discharged from the Asylum, January 19, 1918. Reputation damaged at Sheepshead Bay. Rumors that he lives beyond his income. Reputation to be repaired at once. Retainer $1,500.

"Note—has embezzled sums amounting to $30,000 since March 20th, 1919, excellent family, and secured present position through uncle's influence. Father, President of Seaforth Bank."

I looked at the man on the floor.

"Get up, Vance," said Mr. Wilde in a gentle voice. Vance rose as if hypnotized. "He will do as we suggest now," observed Mr. Wilde, and opening the manuscript, he read the entire history of the Imperial Dynasty of America. Then in a kind and soothing murmur he ran over the important points with Vance, who stood like one stunned. His eyes were so blank and vacant that I imagined he had become half-witted, and remarked it to Mr. Wilde who replied that it was of no consequence anyway. Very patiently we pointed out to Vance what his share in the affair would be, and he seemed to understand after a while. Mr. Wilde explained the manuscript, using several volumes on heraldry to substantiate the result of his researches. He mentioned the establishment of the Dynasty in Carcosa, the lake which connected Hastur, Aldebaran and the mystery of the Hyades. He spoke of Cassilda and Camilla, and sounded the cloudy depths of Demhe, and the lake of Hali. "The scalloped tatters of the King in Yellow must hide Yhtill forever," he muttered, but I do not believe Vance heard him. Then by degrees he led Vance along the ramifications of the Imperial family, to Uoht and Thale, from Naotalba and Phantom of Truth, to Aldones, and then tossing aside his manuscript and notes, he began the wonderful story of the Last King. Fascinated and thrilled I watched him. He threw up his head, his long arms were stretched out in a magnificent gesture of pride and power, and his eyes blazed deep in their sockets like two emeralds. Vance listened stupefied. As for me, when at last Mr. Wilde had finished, and pointing to me, cried, "The cousin of the King!" my head swam with excitement.

Controlling myself with a superhuman effort, I explained to Vance why I alone was worthy of the crown and why my cousin must be exiled or die. I made him understand that my cousin must never marry, even after renouncing all his claims, and how that least of all he should marry the daughter of the Marquis of Avonshire and bring England into the question. I showed him a list of thousands of names which Mr. Wilde had drawn up; every man whose name was there had received the Yellow Sign which no living human being dared disregard. The city, the state, the whole land, were ready to rise and tremble before the Pallid Mask.

The time had come, the people should know the son of Hastur, and the whole world bow to the Black Stars which hang in the sky over Carcosa.

Vance leaned on the table, his head buried in his hands. Mr. Wilde drew a rough sketch on the margin of yesterday's *Herald* with a bit of lead pencil. It was a plan of Hawberk's rooms. Then he wrote out the order and affixed the seal, and shaking like a palsied man I signed my first writ of execution with my name Hildred-Rex.

Mr. Wilde clambered to the floor and unlocking the cabinet, took a long square box from the first shelf. This he brought to the table and opened. A new knife lay in the tissue paper inside and I picked it up and handed it to Vance, along with the order and the plan of Hawberk's apartment. Then Mr. Wilde told Vance he could go; and he went, shambling like an outcast of the slums.

I sat for a while watching the daylight fade behind the square tower of the Judson Memorial Church, and finally, gathering up the manuscript and notes, took my hat and started for the door.

Mr. Wilde watched me in silence. When I had stepped into the hall I looked back. Mr. Wilde's small eyes were still fixed on me. Behind him, the shadows gathered in the fading light. Then I closed the door behind me and went out into the darkening streets.

I had eaten nothing since breakfast, but I was not hungry. A wretched half-starved creature, who stood looking across the street at the Lethal Chamber, noticed me and came up to tell me a tale of misery. I gave him money, I don't know why, and he went away without thanking me. An hour later another outcast approached and whined his story. I had a blank bit of paper in my pocket, on which was traced the Yellow Sign and I handed it to him. He looked at it stupidly for a moment and then with an uncertain glance at me, folded it with what seemed to me exaggerated care and placed it in his bosom.

The electric lights were sparkling among the trees, and the new moon shone in the sky above the Lethal Chamber. It was tiresome waiting in the square; I wandered from the Marble Arch to the artillery stables, and back again to the lotos fountain. The flowers and grass exhaled a fragrance which troubled me. The jet of the fountain played in the moonlight, and the musical splash of falling drops reminded me of the tinkle of chained mail in Hawberk's shop. But it was not so fascinating, and the dull sparkle of the moonlight on the water brought no such sensations of exquisite pleasure, as when the sunshine played over the polished steel of a corselet on Hawberk's knee. I watched the bats darting and turning above the water plants in the fountain basin, but their rapid, jerky flight set my nerves on edge, and I went away again to walk aimlessly to and fro among the trees.

The artillery stables were dark, but in the cavalry barracks the officer's windows were brilliantly lighted, and the sallyport was constantly filled with troopers in fatigue, carrying straw and harness and baskets filled with tin dishes.

Twice the mounted sentry at the gates was changed, while I wandered up and down the asphalt walk. I looked at my watch. It was nearly time. The lights in the barracks went out one by one, the barred gate was closed, and every minute or two an officer passed in through the side wicket, leaving a rattle of accoutrements and a jingle of spurs on the night air. The square had become very silent. The last homeless loiterer had been driven away by the gray-coated park policemen, the car tracks along Wooster Street were deserted, and the only sound which broke the stillness was the stamping of the sentry's horse and the ring of his sabre against the saddle pommel. In the barracks, the officer's quarters were still lighted, and military servants passed and repassed before the bay windows. Twelve o'clock sounded from the new spire of St. Francis Xavier, and at the last stroke of the sad-toned bell a figure passed through the wicket beside the portcullis, returned the salute of the sentry, and crossing the street entered the square and advanced toward the Benedick apartment house.

"Louis," I called.

The man pivoted on his spurred heels and came straight toward me.

"Is that you, Hildred?"

"Yes, you are on time."

I took his offered hand, and we strolled toward the Lethal Chamber.

He rattled on about his wedding and the graces of Constance, and their future prospects, calling my attention to his captain's shoulder-straps, and the triple gold arabesque on his sleeve and fatigue cap. I believe I listened as much to the music of his spurs and sabre as I did to his boyish babble, and at last we stood under the elms on the Fourth Street corner of the square opposite the Lethal Chamber. Then he laughed and asked me what I wanted with him. I motioned him to a seat on a bench under the electric light, and sat down beside him. He looked at me curiously, with that same searching glance which I hate and fear so in doctors. I felt the insult of his look, but he did not know it, and I carefully concealed my feelings.

"Well, old chap," he enquired, "what can I do for you?"

I drew from my pocket the manuscript and notes of the Imperial Dynasty of America, and looking him in the eye said:

"I will tell you. On your word as a soldier, promise me to read this manuscript from beginning to end, without asking me a question. Promise me to read these notes in the same way, and promise me to listen to what I have to tell later."

"I promise, if you wish it," he said pleasantly. "Give me the paper, Hildred."

He began to read, raising his eyebrows with a puzzled whimsical air, which made me tremble with suppressed anger. As he advanced, his eyebrows contracted, and his lips seemed to form the word, "rubbish."

Then he looked slightly bored, but apparently for my sake read, with an attempt at interest, which presently ceased to be an effort. He started when in the closely-written pages he came to his own name, and when he came to mine he lowered the paper, and looked sharply at me for a moment. But he kept his word, and resumed his reading, and I let the half-formed question die on his lips unanswered. When he came to the end and read the signature of Mr. Wilde, he folded the paper carefully and returned it to me. I handed him the notes, and he settled back, pushing his fatigue cap up to his forehead, with a boyish gesture, which I remembered so well in school. I watched his face as he read, and when he finished I took the notes with the manuscript, and placed them in my pocket. Then I unfolded a scroll marked with the Yellow Sign. He saw the sign, but he did not seem to recognize it, and I called his attention to it somewhat sharply.

"Well," he said, "I see it. What is it?"

"It is the Yellow Sign," I said, angrily.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Louis, in that flattering voice, which Doctor Archer used to employ with me, and would probably have employed again, had I not settled his affair for him.

I kept my rage down and answered as steadily as possible, "Listen, you have engaged your word?"

"I am listening, old chap," he replied soothingly.

I began to speak very calmly.

"Dr. Archer, having by some means become possessed of the secret of the Imperial Succession, attempted to deprive me of my right, alleging that because of a fall from my horse four years ago, I had become mentally deficient. He presumed to place me under restraint in his own house in hopes of either driving me insane or poisoning me. I have not forgotten it. I visited him last night and the interview was final."

Louis turned quite pale, but did not move. I resumed triumphantly, "There are yet three people to be interviewed in the interests of Mr. Wilde and myself. They are my cousin Louis, Mr. Hawberk, and his daughter Constance."

Louis sprang to his feet and I arose also, and flung the paper marked with the Yellow Sign to the ground.

"Oh, I don't need that to tell you what I have to say," I cried with a laugh of triumph. "You must renounce the crown to me, do you hear, to *me.*"

Louis looked at me with a startled air, but recovering himself said kindly, "Of course I renounce the—what is it I must renounce?"

"The crown," I said angrily.

"Of course," he answered, "I renounce it. Come, old chap, I'll walk back to your rooms with you."

"Don't try any of your doctor's tricks on me," I cried, trembling with fury. "Don't act as if you think I am insane."

"What nonsense," he replied. "Come, it's getting late, Hildred."

"No," I shouted, "you must listen. You cannot marry, I forbid it. Do you hear? I forbid it. You shall renounce the crown, and in reward I grant you exile, but if you refuse you shall die."

He tried to calm me but I was roused at last, and drawing my long knife barred his way.

Then I told him how they would find Dr. Archer in the cellar with his throat open, and I laughed in his face when I thought of Vance and his knife, and the order signed by me.

"Ah, you are the King," I cried, "but I shall be King. Who are you to keep me from Empire over all the habitable earth! I was born the cousin of a king, but I shall be King!"

Louis stood white and rigid before me. Suddenly a man came running up Fourth Street, entered the gate of the Lethal Temple, traversed the path to the bronze doors at full speed, and plunged into the death chamber with the cry of one demented, and I laughed until I wept tears, for I had recognized Vance, and knew that Hawberk and his daughter were no longer in my way.

"Go," I cried to Louis, "you have ceased to be a menace. You will never marry Constance now, and if you marry anyone else in your exile, I will visit you as I did my doctor last night. Mr. Wilde takes charge of you to-morrow." Then I turned and darted into South Fifth Avenue, and with a cry of terror Louis dropped his belt and sabre and followed me like the wind. I heard him close behind me at the corner of Bleecker Street, and I dashed into the doorway under Hawberk's sign. He cried, "Halt, or I fire!" but when he saw that I flew up the stairs leaving Hawberk's shop below, he left me and I heard him hammering and shouting at their door as though it was possible to arouse the dead.

Mr. Wilde's door was open, and I entered crying, "It is done, it is done! Let the nations rise and look upon their King!" but I could not find Mr. Wilde, so I went to the cabinet and took the splendid diadem from its case. Then I drew on the white silk robe, embroidered with the Yellow Sign, and placed the crown upon my head. At last I was King, King by my right in Hastur, King because I knew the mystery of the Hyades, and my mind had sounded the depths of the Lake of Hali. I was King! The first gray pencillings of dawn would raise a tempest which would shake two hemispheres. Then as I stood, my every nerve pitched to the highest tension, faint with the joy and splendor of my thought, without, in the dark passage, a man groaned.

I seized the tallow dip and sprang to the door. The cat passed me like a demon, and the tallow dip went out, but my long knife flew swifter than she, and I heard her screech, and I knew that my knife had found her. For a moment I listened to her tumbling and thumping about in the darkness, and then when her frenzy ceased, I lighted a lamp and raised it over my head. Mr. Wilde lay on the floor with his throat torn open. At first I thought he was dead, but as I looked, a green sparkle came into his sunken eyes, his mutilated hand trembled, and then a spasm stretched his mouth from ear to ear. For a moment my terror and despair gave place to hope, but as I bent over him his eyeballs rolled clean around in his head, and he died. Then while I stood, transfixed with rage and despair, seeing my crown, my empire, every hope and every ambition, my very life, lying prostrate there with the dead master, *they* came, seized me from behind, and bound me until my veins stood out like cords, and my voice failed with paroxysms of my frenzied screams. But I still raged, bleeding and infuriated among them, and more than one policeman felt my sharp teeth. Then when I could no longer move they came nearer; I saw old Hawberk, and behind him my cousin Louis' ghastly face, and farther away, in the corner, a woman, Constance, weeping softly.

"Ah! I see it now!" I shrieked. "You have seized the throne and the empire. Woe! woe to you who are crowned with the crown of the King in Yellow!"

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr. Castaigne died yesterday in the Asylum for the Criminal Insane.] ❋

The Mask

Camilla: You, sir, should unmask.
Stranger: Indeed?
Cassilda: Indeed it's time. We all have laid aside disguise but you.
Stranger: I wear no mask.
Camilla: (Terrified, aside to Cassilda.) No mask? No mask!
—The King In Yellow: *Act 1—Scene 2d.*

I

Although I knew nothing of chemistry, I listened fascinated. He picked up an Easter lily which Geneviève had brought that morning from Notre Dame and dropped it into the basin. Instantly the liquid lost its crystalline clearness. For a second the lily was enveloped in a milk-white foam, which disappeared, leaving the fluid opalescent. Changing tints of orange and crimson played over the surface, and then what seemed to be a ray of pure sunlight struck through from the bottom where the lily was resting. At the same instant he plunged his hand into the basin and drew out the flower. "There is no danger," he explained, "if you choose the right moment. That golden ray is the signal."

He held the lily toward me and I took it in my hand. It had turned to stone, to the purest marble.

"You see," he said, "it is without a flaw. What sculptor could reproduce it?"

The marble was white as snow, but in its depths the veins of the lily were tinged with palest azure, and a faint flush lingered deep in its heart.

"Don't ask me the reason of that," he smiled, noticing my wonder. "I have no idea why the veins and heart are tinted, but they always are. Yesterday I tried one of Geneviève's gold fish,—there it is."

The fish looked as if sculptured in marble. But if you held it to the light the stone was beautifully veined with a faint blue, and from somewhere within came a rosy light like the tint which slumbers in an opal. I looked into the basin. Once more it seemed filled with clearest crystal.

"If I should touch it now?" I demanded.

"I don't know," he replied, "but you had better not try."

"There is one thing I'm curious about," I said, "and that is where the ray of sunlight came from."

"It looked like a sunbeam true enough," he said. "I don't know, it always comes when I immerse any living thing. Perhaps," he continued smiling, "perhaps it is the vital spark of the creature escaping to the source from whence it came."

I saw he was mocking and threatened him with a mahl-stick, but he only laughed and changed the subject.

"Stay to lunch. Geneviève will be here directly."

"I saw her going to early mass," I said, "and she looked as fresh and sweet as that lily—before you destroyed it."

"Do you think I destroyed it?" said Boris gravely.

"Destroyed, preserved, how can we tell?"

We sat in the corner of a studio near his unfinished group of "The Fates." He leaned back on the sofa, twirling a sculptor's chisel and squinting at his work.

"By the way," he said, "I have finished pointing up that old academic Ariadne and I suppose it will have to go to the Salon. It's all I have ready this year, but after the success the 'Madonna' brought me I feel ashamed to send a thing like that."

The "Madonna," an exquisite marble for which Geneviève had sat, had been the sensation of last year's Salon. I looked at the Ariadne. It was a magnificent piece of technical work, but I agreed with Boris that the world would expect something better of him than that. Still it was impossible now to think of finishing in time for the Salon, that splendid terrible group half shrouded in the marble behind me. "The Fates" would have to wait.

We were proud of Boris Yvain. We claimed him and he claimed us on the strength of his having been born in America, although his father was French and his mother was a Russian. Every one in the Beaux Arts called him Boris. And yet there were only two of us whom he addressed in the same familiar way; Jack Scott and myself.

Perhaps my being in love with Geneviève had something to do with his affection for me. Not that it had ever been acknowledged between us. But after all was settled, and she had told me with tears in her eyes that it was Boris whom she loved, I went over to his house and congratulated him. The perfect cordiality of that interview did not deceive either of us, I always believed, although to one at least it was a great comfort. I do not think he and Geneviève ever spoke of the matter together, but Boris knew.

Geneviève was lovely. The Madonna-like purity of her face might have been inspired by the Sanctus in Gounod's Mass. But I was always glad when she changed that mood for what we called her "April Manoeuvres." She was often as variable as an April day. In the morning grave, dignified and sweet, at noon laughing, capricious, at evening whatever one least expected. I preferred her so rather than in that Madonna-like tranquillity which stirred the depths of my heart. I was dreaming of Geneviève when he spoke again.

"What do you think of my discovery, Alec?"

"I think it wonderful."

"I shall make no use of it, you know, beyond satisfying my own curiosity so far as may be and the secret will die with me."

"It would be rather a blow to sculpture, would it not? We painters lose more than we ever gain by photography."

Boris nodded, playing with the edge of the chisel.

"This new vicious discovery would corrupt the world of art. No, I shall never confide the secret to anyone," he said slowly.

It would be hard to find any one less informed about such phenomena than myself; but of course I had heard of mineral springs so saturated with silica that the leaves and twigs which fell into them were turned to stone after a time. I dimly comprehended the process, how the silica replaced the vegetable matter, atom by atom, and the result was a duplicate of the object in stone. This I confess had never interested me greatly, and as for the ancient fossils thus produced, they disgusted me. Boris, it appeared, feeling curiosity instead of repugnance, had investigated the subject, and had accidentally stumbled on a solution which, attacking the immersed object with a ferocity unheard of, in a second did the work of years. This was all I could make out of the strange story he had just been telling me. He spoke again after a long silence.

"I am almost frightened when I think what I have found. Scientists would go mad over the discovery. It was so simple too; it discovered itself. When I think of that formula, and that new element precipitated in metallic scales—"

"What new element?"

"Oh, I haven't thought of naming it, and I don't believe I ever shall. There are enough precious metals now in the world to cut throats over."

I pricked up my ears. "Have you struck gold, Boris?"

"No, better;—but see here, Alec!" he laughed, starting up. "You and I have all we need in this world. Ah! how sinister and covetous you look already!" I laughed too, and told him I was devoured by the desire for gold, and we had better talk of something else; so when Geneviève came in shortly after, we had turned our backs on alchemy.

Geneviève was dressed in silvery gray from head to foot. The light glinted along the soft curves of her fair hair as she turned her cheek to Boris; then she saw me and returned my greeting. She had never before failed to blow me a kiss from the tips of her white fingers, and I promptly complained of the omission. She smiled and held out her hand which dropped almost before it had touched mine; then she said, looking at Boris,

"You must ask Alec to stay for luncheon." This also was something new. She had always asked me herself until to-day.

"I did," said Boris shortly.

"And you said yes, I hope," she turned to me with a charming conventional smile. I might have been an acquaintance of the day before yesterday. I made her a low bow. "J'avais bien l'honneur, madame," but refusing to take up our usual bantering tone she murmured a hospitable commonplace and disappeared. Boris and I looked at one another.

"I had better go home, don't you think?" I asked.

"Hanged if I know!" he replied frankly.

While we were discussing the advisability of my departure Geneviève reappeared in the doorway without her bonnet. She was wonderfully beautiful, but her color was too deep and her lovely eyes were too bright. She came straight up to me and took my arm.

"Luncheon is ready. Was I cross, Alec? I thought I had a headache but I haven't. Come here, Boris;" and she slipped her other arm through his. "Alec knows that after you there is no one in the world whom I like as well as I like him, so if he sometimes feels snubbed it won't hurt him."

"A la bonheur!" I cried, "who says there are no thunderstorms in April?"

"Are you ready?" chanted Boris. "Aye ready;" and arm in arm we raced into the dining-room scandalizing the servants. After all we were not so much to blame; Geneviève was eighteen, Boris was twenty-three and I not quite twenty-one.

II

Some work that I was doing about this time on the decoration for Geneviève's boudoir kept me constantly at the quaint little hotel in the rue Sainte-Cécile. Boris and I in those days labored hard but as we pleased, which was fitfully, and we all three, with Jack Scott, idled a great deal together.

One quiet afternoon I had been wandering alone over the house examining curios, prying into odd corners, bringing out sweetmeats and cigars from strange hiding-places, and at last I stopped in the bathing-room. Boris all over clay stood there washing his hands.

The room was built of rose-colored marble excepting the floor which was tesselated in rose and gray. In the centre was a square pool sunken below the surface of the floor; steps led down into it, sculptured pillars supported a frescoed ceiling. A delicious marble Cupid appeared to have just alighted on his pedestal at the upper end of the room. The whole interior was Boris' work and mine. Boris, in his working clothes of white canvas, scraped the traces of clay and red modelling wax from his handsome hands, and coquetted over his shoulder with the Cupid.

"I see you," he insisted, "don't try to look the other way and pretend not to see me. You know who made you, little humbug!"

It was always my rôle to interpret Cupid's sentiments in these conversations, and when my turn came I responded in such a manner, that Boris seized my arm and dragged me toward the pool, declaring he would duck me. Next instant he dropped my arm and turned pale. "Good God!" he said, "I forgot the pool is full of the solution!"

I shivered a little, and drily advised him to remember better where he had stored the precious liquid.

"In Heaven's name why do you keep a small lake of that grewsome stuff here of all places!" I asked.

"I want to experiment on something large," he replied.

"On me, for instance!"

"Ah! that came too close for jesting; but I do want to watch the action of that solution on a more highly organized living body; there is that big white rabbit," he said, following me into the studio.

Jack Scott, wearing a paint-stained jacket, came wandering in, appropriated all the Oriental sweetmeats he could lay his hands on, looted the cigarette case, and finally he and Boris disappeared together to visit the Luxembourg gallery, where a new silver bronze by Rodin and a landscape of Monet's were claiming the exclusive attention of artistic France. I went back to the studio, and resumed my work. It was a Renaissance screen, which Boris wanted me to paint for Geneviève's boudoir. But the small boy who was unwillingly dawdling through a series of poses for it, to-day refused all bribes to be good. He never rested an instant in the same position, and inside of five minutes, I had as many different outlines of the little beggar.

"Are you posing, or are you executing a song and dance, my friend?" I inquired.

"Whichever monsieur pleases," he replied with an angelic smile.

Of course I dismissed him for the day, and of course I paid him for the full time, that being the way we spoil our models.

After the young imp had gone, I made a few perfunctory daubs at my work, but was so thoroughly out of humor, that it took me the rest of the afternoon to undo the damage I had done, so at last I scraped my palette, stuck my brushes in a bowl of black soap, and strolled into the smoking-room. I really believe that, excepting Geneviève's apartments, no room in the house was so free from the perfume of tobacco as this one. It was a queer chaos of odds and ends hung with threadbare tapestry. A sweet-toned old spinet in good repair stood by the window. There were stands of weapons, some old and dull, others bright and modern, festoons of Indian and Turkish armor over the mantel, two or three good pictures, and a pipe-rack. It was here that we used to come for new sensations in smoking. I doubt if any type of pipe ever existed which was not represented in that rack. When we had selected one, we immediately carried it somewhere else and smoked it; for the place was, on the whole, more gloomy and less inviting than any in the house. But this afternoon, the twilight was very soothing, the rugs and skins on the floor looked brown and soft and drowsy; the big couch was piled with cushions, I found my pipe and curled up there for an unaccustomed smoke in the smoking-room. I had chosen one with a long flexible stem, and lighting it fell to dreaming. After a while it went out, but I did not stir. I dreamed on and presently fell asleep.

I awoke to the saddest music I had ever heard. The room was quite dark, I had no idea what time it was. A ray of moonlight silvered one edge of the old spinet, and the polished wood seemed to exhale the sounds as perfume floats above a box of sandal wood. Some one rose in the darkness, and came away weeping quietly, and I was fool enough to cry out "Geneviève!"

She dropped at my voice, and I had time to curse myself while I made a light and tried to raise her from the floor. She shrank away with a murmur of pain. She was very quiet, and asked for Boris. I carried her to the divan, and went to look for him, but he was not in the house, and the servants were gone to bed. Perplexed and anxious, I hurried back to Geneviève. She lay where I had left her, looking very white.

"I can't find Boris nor any of the servants," I said.

"I know," she answered faintly, "Boris has gone to Ept with Mr. Scott. I did not remember when I sent you for him just now."

"But he can't get back in that case before to-morrow afternoon, and—are you hurt? Did I frighten you into falling? What an awful fool I am, but I was only half awake."

"Boris thought you had gone home before dinner. Do please excuse us for letting you stay here all this time."

"I have had a long nap," I laughed, "so sound that I did not know whether I was still asleep or not when I found myself staring at a figure that was moving toward me, and called out your name. Have you been trying the old spinet? You must have played very softly."

I would tell a thousand more lies worse than that one to see the look of relief that came into her face. She smiled adorably and said in her natural voice: "Alec, I tripped on that wolf's head, and I think my ankle is sprained. Please call Marie and then go home."

I did as she bade me and left her there when the maid came in.

III

At noon next day when I called, I found Boris walking restlessly about his studio.

"Geneviève is asleep just now," he told me, "the sprain is nothing, but why should she have such a high fever? The doctor can't account for it; or else he will not," he muttered.

"Geneviève has a fever?" I asked.

"I should say so, and has actually been a little light-headed at intervals all night. The idea! gay little Geneviève, without a care in the world,—and she keeps saying her heart's broken, and she wants to die!"

My own heart stood still.

Boris leaned against the door of his studio, looking down, his hands in his pockets, his kind, keen eyes clouded, a new line of trouble drawn "over the mouth's good mark, that made the smile." The maid had orders to summon him the instant Geneviève opened her eyes. We waited and waited, and Boris growing restless wandered about, fussing with modelling wax and red clay. Suddenly he started for the next room. "Come and see my rose-colored bath full of death," he cried.

"Is it death?" I asked to humor his mood.

"You are not prepared to call it life, I suppose," he answered. As he spoke he plucked a solitary gold fish squirming and twisting out of its globe. "We'll send this one after the other—wherever that is," he said. There was feverish excitement in his voice. A dull weight of fever lay on my limbs and on my brain as I followed him to the fair crystal pool with its pink-tinted sides; and he dropped the creature in. Falling, its scales flashed with a hot orange gleam in its angry twistings and contortions; the moment it struck the liquid it became rigid and sank heavily to the bottom. Then came the milky foam, the splendid hues radiating on the surface and then the shaft of pure serene light broke through from seemingly infinite depth. Boris plunged in his hand and drew out an exquisite marble thing, blue-veined, rose-tinted and glistening with opalescent drops.

"Child's play," he muttered, and looked wearily, longingly at me,—as if I could answer such questions! But Jack Scott came in and entered into the "game" as he called it with ardor. Nothing would do but to try the experiment on the white rabbit then and there. I was willing that Boris should find distraction from his cares, but I hated to see the life go out of a warm, living creature and I declined to be present. Picking up a book at random I sat down in the studio to read. Alas, I had found "The King in Yellow." After a few moments which seemed ages, I was putting it away with a nervous shudder, when Boris and Jack came in bringing their marble rabbit. At the same time the bell rang above and a cry came from the sick room. Boris was gone like a flash, and the next moment he called, "Jack, run for the doctor; bring him back with you. Alec, come here."

I went and stood at her door. A frightened maid came out in haste and ran away to fetch some remedy. Geneviève, sitting bolt upright, with crimson cheeks and glittering eyes, babbled incessantly and resisted Boris' gentle restraint. He called me to help. At my first touch she sighed and sank back, closing her eyes, and then—then—as we still bent above her, she opened them again, looked straight into Boris' face, poor fever-crazed girl, and told her secret. At the same instant, our three lives turned into new channels; the bond that had held us so long together snapped forever and a new bond was forged in its place, for she had spoken my name, and as the fever tortured her, her heart poured out its load of hidden sorrow. Amazed and dumb I bowed my head, while my face burned like a live coal, and the blood surged in my ears, stupefying me with its clamor. Incapable of movement, incapable of speech, I listened to her feverish words in an agony of shame and sorrow. I could not silence her, I could not look at Boris. Then I felt an arm upon my shoulder, and Boris turned a bloodless face to mine.

"It is not your fault, Alec, don't grieve so if she loves you—" but he could not finish; and as the doctor stepped swiftly into the room saying—"Ah, the fever!" I seized Jack Scott and hurried him to the street saying, "Boris would rather be alone." We crossed the street to our own apartments and that night, seeing I was going to be ill too, he went for the doctor again. The last thing I recollect with any distinctness was hearing Jack say, "For Heaven's sake, doctor, what ails him, to wear a face like that?" and I thought of "The King in Yellow" and the Pallid Mask.

I was very ill, for the strain of two years which I had endured since that fatal May morning when Geneviève murmured, "I love you, but I think I love Boris best" told on me at last. I never imagined that it could become more than I could endure. Outwardly tranquil, I had deceived myself. Although the inward battle raged night after night, and I, lying alone in my room, cursed myself for rebellious thoughts unloyal to Boris and unworthy of Geneviève, the morning always brought relief, and I returned to Geneviève and to my dear Boris with a heart washed clean by the tempests of the night.

Never in word or deed or thought while with them, had I betrayed my sorrow even to myself.

The mask of self-deception was no longer a mask for me, it was a part of me. Night lifted it, laying bare the stifled truth below; but there was no one to see except myself, and when day broke the mask fell back again of its own accord. These thoughts passed through my troubled mind as I lay sick, but they were hopelessly entangled with visions of white creatures, heavy as stone, crawling about in Boris' basin,—of the wolf's head on the rug, foaming and snapping at Geneviève, who lay smiling beside it. I thought, too, of The King in Yellow wrapt in the fantastic colors of his tattered mantle, and that bitter cry of Cassilda, "Not upon us, oh King, not upon us!" Feverishly I struggled to put it from me, but I saw the lake of Hali, thin and blank, without a ripple or wind to stir it, and I saw the towers of Carcosa behind the moon. Aldebaran, The Hyades, Alar, Hastur, glided through the cloud rifts which fluttered and flapped as they passed like the scolloped tatters of

The King in Yellow. Among all these, one sane thought persisted. It never wavered, no matter what else was going on in my disordered mind, that my chief reason for existing, was to meet some requirement of Boris and Geneviève. What this obligation was, its nature, was never clear; sometimes it seemed to be protection, sometimes support, through a great crisis. Whatever it seemed to be for the time, its weight rested only on me, and I was never so ill or so weak that I did not respond with my whole soul. There were always crowds of faces about me, mostly strange, but a few I recognized, Boris among them. Afterward they told me that this could not have been, but I know that once at least he bent over me. It was only a touch, a faint echo of his voice, then the clouds settled back on my senses, and I lost him, but he *did* stand there and bend over me *once* at least.

At last, one morning I awoke to find the sunlight falling across my bed, and Jack Scott reading beside me. I had not strength enough to speak aloud, neither could I think, much less remember, but I could smile feebly, as Jack's eye met mine, and when he jumped up and asked eagerly if I wanted anything, I could whisper, "Yes, Boris." Jack moved to the head of my bed, and leaned down to arrange my pillow: I did not see his face, but he answered heartily, "You must wait, Alec, you are too weak to see even Boris."

I waited and I grew strong; in a few days I was able to see whom I would, but meanwhile I had thought and remembered. From the moment when all the past grew clear again in my mind, I never doubted what I should do when the time came, and I felt sure that Boris would have resolved upon the same course so far as he was concerned; as for what pertained to me alone, I knew he would see that also as I did. I no longer asked for anyone. I never inquired why no message came from them; why during the week I lay there, waiting and growing stronger, I never heard their names spoken. Preoccupied with my own searchings for the right way, and with my feeble but determined fight against despair, I simply acquiesced in Jack's reticence, taking for granted that he was afraid to speak of them, lest I should turn unruly and insist on seeing them. Meanwhile I said over and over to myself, how it would be when life began again for us all. We would take up our relations exactly as they were before Geneviève fell ill. Boris and I would look into each other's eyes and there would be neither rancor nor cowardice nor mistrust in that glance. I would be with them again for a little while in the dear intimacy of their home, and then, without pretext or explanation, I would disappear from their lives forever. Boris would know, Geneviève—the only comfort was that she would never know. It seemed, as I thought it over, that I had found the meaning of that sense of obligation which had persisted all through my delirium, and the only possible answer to it. So, when I was quite ready, I beckoned Jack to me one day, and said, "Jack, I want Boris at once; and take my dearest greeting to Geneviève. . . ."

When at last he made me understand that they were both dead, I fell into a wild rage that tore all my little convalescent strength to atoms. I raved and cursed myself into a relapse, from which I crawled forth some weeks afterward a boy of twenty-one who believed that his youth was gone forever. I seemed to be past the capability of further suffering, and one day when Jack handed me a letter and the keys to Boris' house, I took them without a tremor and asked him to tell me all. It was cruel of me to ask him, but there was no help for it, and he leaned wearily on his thin hands, to reopen the wound which could never entirely heal. He began very quietly.

"Alec, unless you have a clue that I know nothing about, you will not be able to explain any more than I, what has happened. I suspect that you would rather not hear these details, but you must learn them, else I would spare you the relation. God knows I wish I could be spared the telling. I shall use few words.

"That day when I left you in the doctor's care and came back to Boris, I found him working on the 'Fates.' Geneviève, he said, was sleeping under the influence of drugs. She had been quite out of her mind, he said. He kept on working, not talking any more, and I watched him. Before long, I saw that the third figure of the group—the one looking straight ahead, out over the world—bore his face; not as you ever saw it, but as it looked then and to the end. This is one thing for which I should like to find an explanation, but I never shall.

"Well, he worked and I watched him in silence, and we went on that way until nearly midnight. Then we heard a door open and shut sharply, and a swift rush in the next room. Boris sprang through the doorway and I followed; but we were too late. She lay at the bottom of the pool, her hands across her breast. Then Boris shot himself through the heart." Jack stopped speaking, drops of sweat stood under his eyes, and his thin cheeks twitched. "I carried Boris to his room. Then I went back and let that hellish fluid out of the pool, and turning on all the water, washed the marble clean of every drop. When at length I dared descend the steps, I found her lying there as white as snow. At last, when I had decided what was best to do, I went into the laboratory, and first emptied the solution in the basin into the waste-pipe; then I poured the contents of every jar and bottle after it. There was wood in the fireplace, so I built a fire, and breaking the locks of Boris' cabinet I burnt every paper, notebook and letter that I found there. With a mallet from the studio I smashed to pieces all the empty bottles, then loading them into a coal scuttle, I carried them to the cellar and threw them over the red-hot bed of the furnace. Six times I made the journey, and at last, not a vestige remained of anything which might again aid in seeking for the formula which Boris had found. Then at last I dared call the doctor. He is a good man, and together we struggled to keep it from the public. Without him I never could have succeeded. At last we got the servants paid and sent away into the country, where old Rosier keeps them quiet with stories of Boris' and Geneviève's travels in distant lands, from whence they will not return for years. We buried Boris in the little cemetery of Sèvres. The doctor is a good creature and knows when to pity a man who can bear no more. He gave his certificate of heart disease and asked no questions of me."

Then lifting his head from his hands, he said, "Open the letter, Alec; it is for us both."

I tore it open. It was Boris' will dated a year before. He left everything to Geneviève, and in case of her dying childless, I was to take control of the house in the Rue Sainte-Cécile, and Jack Scott, the management at Ept. On our deaths the property reverted to his mother's family in Russia, with the exception of the sculptured marbles executed by himself. These he left to me.

The page blurred under our eyes, and Jack got up and walked to the window. Presently he returned and sat down again. I dreaded to hear what he was going to say, but he spoke with the same simplicity and gentleness.

"Geneviève lies before the Madonna in the marble room. The Madonna bends tenderly above her, and Geneviève smiles back into that calm face that never would have been except for her."

His voice broke, but he grasped my hand, saying, "Courage, Alec." Next morning he left for Ept to fulfil his trust.

IV

The same evening I took the keys and went into the house I had known so well. Everything was in order, but the silence was terrible. Though I went twice to the door of the marble room, I could not force myself to enter. It was beyond my strength. I went into the smoking-room and sat down before the spinet. A small lace handkerchief lay on the keys, and I turned away, choking. It was plain I could not stay, so I locked every door, every window, and the three front and back gates, and went away. Next morning Alcide packed my valise, and leaving him in charge of my apartments I took the Orient express for Constantinople. During the two years that I wandered through the East, at first, in our letters, we never mentioned Geneviève and Boris, but gradually their names crept in. I recollect particularly a passage in one of Jack's letters replying to one of mine.

"What you tell me of seeing Boris bending over you while you lay ill, and feeling his touch on your face, and hearing his voice of course troubles me. This that you describe must have happened a fortnight after he died. I say to myself that you were dreaming, that it was part of your delirium, but the explanation does not satisfy me, nor would it you."

Toward the end of the second year a letter came from Jack to me in India so unlike any thing that I had ever known of him that I decided to return at once to Paris. He wrote, "I am well and sell all my pictures as artists do, who have no need of money. I have not a care of my own, but I am more restless than if I had. I am unable to shake off a strange anxiety about you. It is not apprehension, it is rather a breathless expectancy, of what, God knows! I can only say it is wearing me out. Nights I dream always of you and Boris. I can never recall anything afterward, but I wake in the morning with my heart beating, and all day the excitement increases until I fall asleep at night to recall the same experience. I am quite exhausted by it, and have determined to break up this morbid condition. I must see you. Shall I go to Bombay or will you come to Paris?"

I telegraphed him to expect me by the next steamer.

When we met I thought he had changed very little; I, he insisted, looked in splendid health. It was good to hear his voice again, and as we sat and chatted about what life still held for us, we felt that it was pleasant to be alive in the bright spring weather.

We stayed in Paris together a week, and then I went for a week to Ept with him, but first of all we went to the cemetery at Sèvres, where Boris lay.

"Shall we place the 'Fates' in the little grove above him?" Jack asked, and I answered,

"I think only the 'Madonna' should watch over Boris' grave." But Jack was none the better for my home-coming. The dreams of which he could not retain even the least definite outline continued, and he said that at times the sense of breathless expectancy was suffocating.

"You see I do you harm and not good," I said. "Try a change without me." So he started alone for a ramble among the Channel Islands and I went back to Paris. I had not yet entered Boris' house, now mine, since my return, but I knew it must be done. It had been kept in order by Jack; there were servants there, so I gave up my own apartment and went there to live. Instead of the agitation I had feared, I found myself able to paint there tranquilly. I visited all the rooms—all but one. I could not bring myself to enter the marble room where Geneviève lay, and yet I felt the longing growing daily to look upon her face, to kneel beside her.

One April afternoon, I lay dreaming in the smoking-room, just as I had lain two years before, and mechanically I looked among the tawny Eastern rugs for the wolf-skin. At last I distinguished the pointed ears and flat cruel head, and I thought of my dream where I saw Geneviève lying beside it. The helmets still hung against the threadbare tapestry, among them the old Spanish morion which I remembered Geneviève had once put on when we were amusing ourselves with the ancient bits of mail. I turned my eyes to the spinet; every yellow key seemed eloquent of her caressing hand, and I rose, drawn by the strength of my life's passion to the sealed door of the marble room. The heavy doors swung inward under my trembling hands. Sunlight poured through the window, tipping with gold the wings of Cupid, and lingered like a nimbus over the brows of the Madonna. Her tender face bent in compassion over a marble form so exquisitely pure that I knelt and signed myself. Geneviève lay in the shadow under the Madonna, and yet, through her white arms, I saw the pale azure vein, and beneath her softly clasped hands the folds of her dress were tinged with rose, as if from some faint warm light within her breast.

Bending with a breaking heart I touched the marble drapery with my lips, then crept back into the silent house.

A maid came and brought me a letter, and I sat down in the little conservatory to read it; but as I was about to break the seal, seeing the girl lingering, I asked her what she wanted.

She stammered something about a white rabbit that had been caught in the house and asked what should be done with it. I told her to let it loose in the walled garden behind the house and opened my letter. It was from Jack, but so incoherent that I thought he must have lost his reason. It was nothing but a series of prayers to me not to leave the house until he could get back; he could not tell me why, there were the dreams, he said—he could explain nothing, but he was sure that I must not leave the house in the Rue Sainte-Cécile.

As I finished reading I raised my eyes and saw the same maid-servant standing in the doorway holding a glass dish in which two gold fish were swimming: "Put them back into the tank and tell me what you mean by interrupting me," I said.

With a half suppressed whimper she emptied water and fish into an aquarium at the end of the conservatory, and turning to me asked my permission to leave my service. She said people were playing tricks on her, evidently with a design of getting her into trouble; the marble rabbit had been stolen and a live one had been brought into the house; the two beautiful marble fish were gone and she had just found those common live things flopping on the dining-room floor. I reassured her and sent her away saying I would look about myself. I went into the studio; there was nothing there but my canvasses and some casts, except the marble of the Easter Lily. I saw it on a table across the room. Then I strode angrily over to it. But the flower I lifted from the table was fresh and fragile and filled the air with perfume.

Then suddenly I comprehended and sprang through the hall-way to the marble room. The doors flew open, the sunlight streamed into my face and through it, in a heavenly glory, the Madonna smiled, as Geneviève lifted her flushed face from her marble couch, and opened her sleepy eyes. ❋

In the Court of the Dragon

Oh Thou who burn'st in heart for those who burn
In Hell, whose fires thyself shall feed in turn;
How long be crying,—"Mercy on them, God!"
Why, who art thou to teach and He to learn?

In the Church of St. Barnabé vespers were over; the clergy left the altar; the little choir-boys flocked across the chancel and settled in the stalls. A Suisse in rich uniform marched down the south aisle, sounding his staff at every fourth step on the stone pavement; behind him came that eloquent preacher and good man, Monseigneur C—.

My chair was near the chancel rail. I now turned toward the west end of the church. The other people between the altar and the pulpit turned too. There was a little scraping and rustling while the congregation seated itself again; the preacher mounted the pulpit stairs, and the organ voluntary ceased.

I had always found the organ-playing at St. Barnabé highly interesting. Learned and scientific it was, too much so for my small knowledge, but expressing a vivid if cold intelligence. Moreover, it possessed the French quality of taste; taste reigned supreme, self-controlled, dignified and reticent.

To-day, however, from the first chord I had felt a change for the worse, a sinister change. During vespers it had been chiefly the chancel organ which supported the beautiful choir, but now and again, quite wantonly as it seemed, from the west gallery where the great organ stands, a heavy hand had struck across the church, at the serene peace of those clear voices. It was something more than harsh and dissonant, and it betrayed no lack of skill. As it recurred again and again, it set me thinking of what my architect's books say about the custom in early times to consecrate the choir as soon as it was built, and that the nave, being finished sometimes half a century later, often did not get any blessing at all: I wondered idly if that had been the case at St. Barnabé, and whether something not usually supposed to be at home in a Christian church, might have entered undetected, and taken possession of the west gallery. I had read of such things happening too, but not in works on architecture.

Then I remembered that St. Barnabé was not much more than a hundred years old, and smiled at the incongruous association of mediaeval superstitions with that cheerful little piece of eighteenth century rococo.

But now vespers were over, and there should have followed a few quiet chords, fit to accompany meditation, while we waited for the sermon. Instead of that, the discord at the lower end of the church broke out with the departure of the clergy, as if now nothing could control it.

I belong to those children of an older and simpler generation, who do not love to seek for psychological subtleties in art; and I have ever refused to find in music anything more than melody and harmony, but I felt that in the labyrinth of sounds now issuing from that instrument there was something being hunted. Up and down the pedals chased him, while the manuals blared approval. Poor devil! whoever he was, there seemed small hope of escape!

My nervous annoyance changed to anger. Who was doing this? How dare he play like that in the midst of divine service? I glanced at the people near me: not one appeared to be in the least disturbed. The placid brows of the kneeling nuns, still turned toward the altar, lost none of their devout abstraction, under the pale shadow of their white headdress. The fashionable lady beside me was looking expectantly at Monseigneur C—. For all her face betrayed, the organ might have been singing an Ave Maria.

But now, at last, the preacher had made the sign of the cross, and commanded silence. I turned to him gladly. Thus far I had not found the rest I had counted on, when I entered St. Barnabé that afternoon.

I was worn out by three nights of physical suffering and mental trouble: the last had been the worst, and it was an exhausted body, and a mind benumbed and yet acutely sensitive, which I had brought to my favorite church for healing. For I had been reading "The King in Yellow."

"The sun ariseth; they gather themselves together and lay them down in their dens." Monseigneur C— delivered his text in a calm voice, glancing quietly over the congregation. My eyes turned, I knew not why, toward the lower end of the church. The organist was coming from behind his pipes, and passing along the gallery on his way out, I saw him disappear by a small door that leads to some stairs which descend directly to the street. He was a slender man, and his face was as white as his coat was black. "Good riddance!" I thought, "with your wicked music! I hope your assistant will play the closing voluntary."

With a feeling of relief, with a deep, calm feeling of relief, I turned back to the mild face in the pulpit, and settled myself to listen. Here at last was the ease of mind I longed for.

"My children," said the preacher, "one truth the human soul finds hardest of all to learn; that it has nothing to fear. It can never be made to see that nothing can really harm it."

"Curious doctrine!" I thought, "for a Catholic priest. Let us see how he will reconcile that with the Fathers."

"Nothing can really harm the soul," he went on, in his coolest, clearest tones, "because—"

But I never heard the rest; my eye left his face, I knew not for what reason, and sought the lower end of the church. The same man was coming out from behind the organ, and was passing along the gallery *the same way*. But there had not been time for him to return, and if he had returned, I must have seen him. I felt a faint chill, and my heart sank; and yet, his going and coming were no affair of mine. I looked at him: I could not look away from his black figure and his white face. When he was exactly opposite to me, he turned and sent across the church, straight into my eyes, a look of hate, intense and deadly: I have never seen any other like it; would to God I might never see it again! Then he disappeared by the same door through which I had watched him depart less than sixty seconds before.

I sat and tried to collect my thoughts. My first sensation was like that of a very young child badly hurt, when it catches its breath before crying out.

To suddenly find myself the object of such hatred was exquisitely painful: and this man was an utter stranger. Why should he hate me so? Me, whom he had never seen before? For the moment all other sensation was merged in this one pang: even fear was subordinate to grief, and for that moment I never doubted; but in the next I began to reason, and a sense of the incongruous came to my aid.

As I have said, St. Barnabé is a modern church. It is small and well lighted; one sees all over it almost at a glance. The organ gallery gets a strong white light from a row of long windows in the clere-story, which have not even colored glass.

The pulpit being in the middle of the church, it followed that, when I was turned toward it, whatever moved at the west end could not fail to attract my eye. When the organist passed it was no wonder that I saw him: I had simply miscalculated the interval between his first and his second passing. He has come in that last time by the other side-door. As for the look which had so upset me, there had been no such thing, and I was a nervous fool.

I looked about. This was a likely place to harbor supernatural horrors! That clear-cut, reasonable face of Monseigneur C—, his collected manner, and easy, graceful gestures, were they not just a little discouraging to the notion of a gruesome mystery? I glanced above his head, and almost laughed. That flyaway lady, supporting one corner of the pulpit canopy, which looked like a fringed damask table-cloth in a high wind, at the first attempt of a basilisk to pose up there in the organ loft, she would point her gold trumpet at him, and puff him out of existence! I laughed to myself over this conceit, which, at the time, I thought very amusing, and sat and chaffed myself and everything else, from the old harpy outside the railing, who had made me pay ten centimes for my chair, before she would let me in (she was more like a basilisk, I told myself, than was my organist with the anaemic complexion): from that grim old dame, to, yes, alas! to Monseigneur C—, himself. For all devoutness had fled. I had never yet done such a thing in my life, but now I felt a desire to mock.

As for the sermon, I could not hear a word of it, for the jingle in my ears of

> "The skirts of St. Paul has reached,
> Having preached us those six Lent lectures,
> More unctuous than ever he preached:"

keeping time to the most fantastic and irreverent thoughts.

It was no use to sit there any longer: I must get out of doors and shake myself free from this hateful mood. I knew the rudeness I was committing, but still I rose and left the church.

A spring sun was shining on the rue St. Honoré, as I ran down the church steps. On one corner stood a barrow full of yellow jonquils, pale violets from the Riviera, dark Russian violets, and white Roman hyacinths in a golden cloud of mimosa. The street was full of Sunday pleasure seekers. I swung my cane and laughed with the rest. Some one overtook and passed me. He never turned, but there was the same deadly malignity in his white profile that there had been in his eyes. I watched him as long as I could see him. His lithe back expressed the same menace; every step that carried him away from me seemed to bear him on some errand connected with my destruction.

I was creeping along, my feet almost refusing to move. There began to dawn in me a sense of responsibility for something long forgotten. It began to seem as if I deserved that which he threatened: it reached a long way back—a long, long way back. It had lain dormant all these years: it was there though, and presently it would rise and confront me. But I would try to escape; and I stumbled as best I could into the rue de Rivoli, across the Place de la Concorde and on the Quai. I looked with sick eyes upon the sun, shining through the white foam of the fountain, pouring over the backs of the dusky bronze river-gods, on the far-away Arc, a structure of amethyst mist, on the countless vistas of gray stems and bare branches faintly green. Then I saw him again coming down one of the chestnut alleys of the Cours la Reine.

I left the river side, plunged blindly across to the Champs Elysées and turned toward the Arc. The setting sun was sending its rays along the green sward of the Rond-point: in the full glow he sat on a bench, children and young mothers all about him. He was nothing but a Sunday lounger, like the others, like myself. I said the words almost aloud, and all the while I gazed on the malignant hatred of his face. But he was not looking at me. I crept past and dragged my leaden feet up the Avenue. I knew that every time I met him brought him nearer to the accomplishment of his purpose and my fate. And still I tried to save myself.

The last rays of sunset were pouring through the great Arc. I passed under it, and met him face to face. I had left him far down the Champs

Elysées, and yet he came in with a stream of people who were returning from the Bois de Boulogne. He came so close that he brushed me. His slender frame felt like iron inside its loose black covering. He showed no signs of haste, nor of fatigue, nor of any human feeling. His whole being expressed but one thing: the will, and the power to work me evil.

In anguish I watched him, where he went down the broad crowded Avenue, that was all flashing with wheels and the trappings of horses, and the helmets of the Garde Republicaine.

He was soon lost to sight; then I turned and fled. Into the Bois, and far out beyond it—I know not where I went, but after a long while as it seemed to me, night had fallen, and I found myself sitting at a table before a small café. I had wandered back into the Bois. It was hours now since I had seen him. Physical fatigue, and mental suffering had left me no more power to think or feel. I was tired, so tired! I longed to hide away in my own den. I resolved to go home. But that was a long way off.

I live in the Court of the Dragon, a narrow passage that leads from the rue de Rennes to the rue du Dragon.

It is an "Impasse;" traversable only for foot passengers. Over the entrance on the rue de Rennes is a balcony, supported by an iron dragon. Within the court tall old houses rise on either side, and close the ends that give on the two streets. Huge gates, swung back during the day into the walls of the deep archways, close this court, after midnight, and one must enter then by ringing at certain small doors on the side. The sunken pavement collects unsavory pools. Steep stairways pitch down to doors that open on the court. The ground floors are occupied by shops of second-hand dealers, and by iron workers. All day long the place rings with the clink of hammers, and the clang of metal bars.

Unsavory as it is below, there is cheerfulness, and comfort, and hard, honest work above.

Five flights up are the ateliers of architects and painters, and the hiding-places of middle-aged students like myself who want to live alone. When I first came here to live I was young, and not alone.

I had to walk awhile before any conveyance appeared, but at last, when I had almost reached the Arc de Triomphe again, an empty cab came along and I took it.

From the Arc to the rue de Rennes is a drive of more than half an hour, especially when one is conveyed by a tired cab horse that has been at the mercy of Sunday fête makers.

There had been time before I passed under the Dragon's wings, to meet my enemy over and over again, but I never saw him once, and now refuge was close at hand.

Before the wide gateway a small mob of children were playing. Our concierge and his wife walked about among them with their black poodle, keeping order; some couples were waltzing on the side-walk. I returned their greetings and hurried in.

All the inhabitants of the court had trooped out into the street. The place was quite deserted, lighted by a few lanterns hung high up, in which the gas burned dimly.

My apartment was at the top of a house, half way down the court, reached by a staircase that descended almost into the street, with only a bit of passage-way intervening. I set my foot on the threshold of the open door, the friendly, old ruinous stairs rose before me, leading up to rest and shelter. Looking back over my right shoulder, I saw *him*, ten paces off. He must have entered the court with me.

He was coming straight on, neither slowly, nor swiftly, but straight on to me. And now he was looking at me. For the first time since our eyes encountered across the church they met now again, and I knew that the time had come.

Retreating backward, down the court, I faced him. I meant to escape by the entrance on the rue du Dragon. His eyes told me that I never should escape.

It seemed ages while we were going, I retreating, he advancing, down the court in perfect silence; but at last I felt the shadow of the archway, and the next step brought me within it. I had meant to turn here and spring through into the street. But the shadow was not that of an archway; it was that of a vault. The great doors on the rue du Dragon were closed. I felt this by the blackness which surrounded me, and at the same instant I read it in his face. How his face gleamed in the darkness, drawing swiftly nearer! The deep vaults, the huge closed doors, their cold iron clamps were all on his side. The thing which he had threatened had arrived: it gathered and bore down on me from the fathomless shadows; the point from which it would strike was his infernal eyes. Hopeless I set my back against the barred doors and defied him.

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There was a scraping of chairs on the stone floor, and a rustling as the congregation rose. I could hear the Suisse's staff in the south aisle, preceding Monseigneur C— to the sacristy.

The kneeling nuns, roused from their devout abstraction, made their reverence and went away. The fashionable lady, my neighbor, rose also, with graceful reserve. As she departed her glance just flitted over my face in disapproval.

Half dead, or so it seemed to me, yet intensely alive to every trifle, I sat among the leisurely moving crowd, then rose too and went toward the door.

I had slept through the sermon. Had I slept through the sermon? I looked up and saw him passing along the gallery to his place. Only his side I saw; the thin bent arm in its black covering looked like one of those devilish, nameless instruments which lie in the disused torture chambers of mediaeval castles.

But I had escaped him, though his eyes had said I should not. *Had* I escaped him? That which gave him the power over me came back out of oblivion, where I had hoped to keep it. For I knew him now. Death and the awful abode of lost souls, whither my weakness long ago had sent him—they had changed him for every other eye, but not for mine. I had recognized him almost from the first; I had never doubted what he was come to do; and now I knew that while my body sat safe in the cheerful little church, he had been hunting my soul in the Court of the Dragon.

I crept to the door; the organ broke out overhead with a blare. A dazzling light filled the church, blotting the altar from my eyes. The people faded away, the arches, the vaulted roof vanished. I raised my seared eyes to the fathomless glare, and I saw the black stars hanging in the heavens: and the wet winds from the Lake of Hali chilled my face.

And now, far away, over leagues of tossing cloud-waves, I saw the moon dripping with spray; and beyond, the towers of Carcosa rose behind the moon.

Death and the awful abode of lost souls, whither my weakness long ago had sent him, had changed him for every other eye but mine. And now I heard *his voice,* rising, swelling, thundering through the flaring light, and as I fell, the radiance increasing, increasing, poured over me in waves of flame. Then I sank into the depths, and I heard the King in Yellow whispering to my soul: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" ❋

The Yellow Sign

Let the red dawn surmise
What we shall do,
When this blue starlight dies
And all is through.

I

There are so many things which are impossible to explain! Why should certain chords in music make me think of the brown and golden tints of autumn foliage? Why should the Mass of Sainte Cécile send my thoughts wandering among caverns whose walls blaze with ragged masses of virgin silver? What was it in the roar and turmoil of Broadway at six o'clock that flashed before my eyes the picture of a still Breton forest where sunlight filtered through spring foliage and Sylvia bent, half curiously, half tenderly, over a small green lizard, murmuring: "To think that this also is a little ward of God!"

When I first saw the watchman his back was toward me. I looked at him indifferently until he went into the church. I paid no more attention to him than I had to any other man who lounged through Washington Square that morning, and when I shut my window and turned back into my studio I had forgotten him. Late in the afternoon, the day being warm, I raised the window again and leaned out to get a sniff of air. A man was standing in the courtyard of the church, and I noticed him again with as little interest as I had that morning. I looked across the square to where the fountain was playing and then, with my mind filled with vague impressions of trees, asphalt drives, and the moving groups of nursemaids and holiday-makers, I started to walk back to my easel. As I turned, my listless glance included the man below in the churchyard. His face was toward me now, and with a perfectly involuntary movement I bent to see it. At the same moment he raised his head and looked at me. Instantly I thought of a coffin-worm. Whatever it was about the man that repelled me I did not know, but the impression of a plump white grave-worm was so intense and nauseating that I must have shown it in my expression, for he turned his puffy face away with a movement which made me think of a disturbed grub in a chestnut.

I went back to my easel and motioned the model to resume her pose. After working awhile I was satisfied that I was spoiling what I had done as rapidly as possible, and I took up a palette knife and scraped the color out again. The flesh tones were sallow and unhealthy, and I did not understand how I could have painted such sickly color into a study which before that had glowed with healthy tones.

I looked at Tessie. She had not changed, and the clear flush of health dyed her neck and cheeks as I frowned.

"Is it something I've done?" she said.

"No—I've made a mess of this arm, and for the life of me I can't see how I came to paint such mud as that into the canvas," I replied.

"Don't I pose well?" she insisted.

"Of course, perfectly."

"Then it's not my fault?"

"No, it's my own."

"I'm very sorry," she said.

I told her she could rest while I applied rag and turpentine to the plague spot on my canvas, and she went off to smoke a cigarette and look over the illustrations in the *Courier Français*.

I did not know whether it was something in the turpentine or a defect in the canvas, but the more I scrubbed the more that gangrene seemed to spread. I worked like a beaver to get it out, and yet the disease appeared to creep from limb to limb of the study before me. Alarmed I strove to arrest it, but now the color on the breast changed and the whole figure seemed to absorb the infection as a sponge soaks up water. Vigorously I plied palette knife, turpentine, and scraper, thinking all the time what a séance I should hold with Duval who had sold me the canvas; but soon I noticed it was not the canvas which was defective, nor yet the colors of Edward. "It must be the turpentine," I thought angrily, "or else my eyes have become so blurred and confused by the afternoon light that I can't see straight." I called Tessie, the model. She came and leaned over my chair blowing rings of smoke into the air.

"What *have* you been doing to it?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing," I growled, "it must be this turpentine!"

"What a horrible color it is now," she continued. "Do you think my flesh resembles green cheese?"

"No, I don't," I said angrily. "Did you ever know me to paint like that before?"

"No, indeed!"

"Well, then!"

"It must be the turpentine, or something," she admitted.

She slipped on a Japanese robe and walked to the window. I scraped and rubbed until I was tired and finally picked up my brushes and hurled them through the canvas with a forcible expression, the tone alone of which reached Tessie's ears.

Nevertheless she promptly began: "That's it! Swear and act silly and ruin your brushes. You've been three weeks on that study, and now look! What's the good of ripping the canvas? What creatures artists are!"

I felt about as much ashamed as I usually did after such an outbreak, and I turned the ruined canvas to the wall. Tessie helped me clean my brushes, and then danced away to dress. From the screen she regaled me with bits of advice concerning whole or partial loss of temper, until, thinking, perhaps, I had been tormented sufficiently, she came out to implore me to button her waist where she could not reach it on the shoulder.

"Everything went wrong from the time you came back from the window and talked about that horrid-looking man you saw in the churchyard," she announced.

"Yes, he probably bewitched the picture," I said yawning. I looked at my watch.

"It's after six, I know," said Tessie, adjusting her hat before the mirror.

"Yes," I replied, "I didn't mean to keep you so long." I leaned out of the window but recoiled with disgust, for the young man with the pasty face stood below in the churchyard. Tessie saw my gesture of disapproval and leaned from the window.

"Is that the man you don't like?" she whispered.

I nodded.

"I can't see his face, but he does look fat and soft. Someway or other," she continued, turning to look at me, "he reminds me of a dream,—an awful dream I once had. Or," she mused, looking down at her shapely shoes, "was it a dream after all?"

"How should I know?" I smiled.

Tessie smiled in reply.

"You were in it," she said, "so perhaps you might know something about it."

"Tessie! Tessie!" I protested, "don't you dare flatter by saying that you dream about me!"

"But I did," she insisted; "shall I tell you about it?"

Tessie leaned back on the open window-sill and began very seriously.

"One night last winter I was lying in bed thinking about nothing at all in particular. I had been posing for you and I was tired out, yet it seemed impossible for me to sleep. I heard the bells in the city ring, ten, eleven, and midnight. I must have fallen asleep about midnight because I don't remember hearing the bells after that. It seemed to me that I had scarcely closed my eyes when I dreamed that something impelled me to go to the window. I rose, and raising the sash leaned out. Twenty-fifth Street was deserted as far as I could see. I began to be afraid; everything outside seemed so—so black and uncomfortable. Then the sound of wheels in the distance came to my ears, and it seemed to me as though that was what I must wait for. Very slowly the wheels approached, and, finally, I could make out a vehicle moving along the street. It came nearer and nearer, and when it passed beneath my window I saw it was a hearse. Then, as I trembled with fear, the driver turned and looked straight at me. When I awoke I was standing by the open window shivering with cold, but the black-plumed hearse and the driver were gone. I dreamed this dream again in March last, and again awoke beside the open window. Last night the dream came again. You remember how it was raining; when I awoke, standing at the open window, my night-dress was soaked."

"But where did I come into the dream?" I asked.

"You—you were in the coffin; but you were not dead."

"In the coffin?"

"Yes."

"How did you know? Could you see me?"

"No; I only knew you were there."

"Had you been eating Welsh rarebits, or lobster salad?" I began laughing, but the girl interrupted me with a frightened cry.

"Hello! What's up?" I said, as she shrank into the embrasure by the window.

"The—the man below in the churchyard;—he drove the hearse."

"Nonsense," I said, but Tessie's eyes were wide with terror. I went to the window and looked out. The man was gone. "Come, Tessie," I urged, "don't be foolish. You have posed too long; you are nervous."

"Do you think I could forget that face?" she murmured. "Three times I saw the hearse pass below my window, and every time the driver turned and looked up at me. Oh, his face was so white and—and soft? It looked dead—it looked as if it had been dead a long time."

I induced the girl to sit down and swallow a glass of Marsala. Then I sat down beside her, and tried to give her some advice.

"Look here, Tessie," I said, "you go to the country for a week or two, and you'll have no more dreams about hearses. You pose all day, and when night comes your nerves are upset. You can't keep this up. Then again, instead of going to bed when your day's work is done, you run off to picnics at Sulzer's Park, or go to the Eldorado or Coney Island, and when you come down here next morning you are fagged out. There was no real hearse. That was a soft-shell crab dream."

She smiled faintly.

"What about the man in the churchyard?"

"Oh, he's only an ordinary unhealthy, everyday creature."

"As true as my name is Tessie Reardon, I swear to you, Mr. Scott, that the face of the man below in the churchyard is the face of the man who drove the hearse!"

"What of it?" I said. "It's an honest trade."

"Then you think I *did* see the hearse?"

"Oh," I said diplomatically, "if you really did, it might not be unlikely that the man below drove it. There is nothing in that."

Tessie rose, unrolled her scented handkerchief and taking a bit of gum from a knot in the hem, placed it in her mouth. Then drawing on her gloves she offered me her hand, with a frank, "Good-night, Mr. Scott," and walked out.

II

The next morning, Thomas, the bellboy, brought me the *Herald* and a bit of news. The church next door had been sold. I thanked Heaven for it, not that it being a Catholic I had any repugnance for the congregation next door, but because my nerves were shattered by a blatant exhorter, whose every word echoed through the aisle of the church as if it had been my own rooms, and who insisted on his r's with a nasal persistence which revolted my every instinct. Then, too, there was a fiend in human shape, an organist, who reeled off some of the grand old hymns with an interpretation of his own, and I longed for the blood of a creature who could play the doxology with an amendment of minor chords which one hears only in a quartet of very young undergraduates. I believe the minister was a good man, but when he bellowed: "And the Lorrrd said unto Moses, the Lorrrd is a man of war; the Lorrrd is his name. My wrath shall wax hot and I will kill you with the sworrrd!" I wondered how many centuries of purgatory it would take to atone for such a sin.

"Who bought the property?" I asked Thomas.

"Nobody that I knows, sir. They do say the gent wot owns this 'ere 'Amilton flats was lookin' at it. 'E might be a bildin' more studios."

I walked to the window. The young man with the unhealthy face stood by the churchyard gate, and at the mere sight of him the same overwhelming repugnance took possession of me.

"By the way, Thomas," I said, "who is that fellow down there?"

Thomas sniffed. "That there worm, sir? 'E's night-watchman of the church, sir. 'E maikes me tired a-sittin' out all night on them steps and lookin' at you insultin' like. I'd a punched 'is 'ed, sir—beg pardon, sir—"

"Go on, Thomas."

"One night a comin' 'ome with 'Arry, the other English boy, I sees 'im a-sittin' there on them steps. We 'ad Molly and Jen with us, sir, the two girls on the tray service, an' 'e looks so insultin' at us that I up and sez: 'Wat you looking hat, you fat slug?'—beg pardon, sir, but that's 'ow I sez, sir. Then 'e don't say nothin' and I sez: 'Come out and I'll punch that puddin' 'ed.' Then I hopens the gate and goes in, but 'e don't say nothin', only looks insultin' like. Then I 'its 'im one, but ugh! 'is 'ed was that cold and mushy it ud sicken you to touch 'im."

"What did he do then?" I asked, curiously.

"'Im? Nawthin'."

"And you, Thomas?"

The young fellow flushed with embarrassment and smiled uneasily.

"Mr. Scott, sir, I ain't no coward an' I can't make it out at all why I run. I was in the 5th Lawncers, sir, bugler at Tel-el-Kebir, an' was shot by the wells."

"You don't mean to say you ran away?"

"Yes, sir; I run."

"Why?"

"That's just what I want to know, sir. I grabbed Molly an' run, an' the rest was as frightened as I."

"But what were they frightened at?"

Thomas refused to answer for a while, but now my curiosity was aroused about the repulsive young man below and I pressed him. Three years' sojourn in America had not only modified Thomas' cockney dialect but had given him the American's fear of ridicule.

"You won't believe me, Mr. Scott, sir?"

"Yes, I will."

"You will lawf at me, sir?"

"Nonsense!"

He hesitated. "Well, sir, it's Gawd's truth that when I 'it 'im 'e grabbed me wrists, sir, and when I twisted 'is soft, mushy fist one of 'is fingers come off in me 'and."

The utter loathing and horror of Thomas' face must have been reflected in my own for he added:

"It's orful, an' now when I see 'im I just go away. 'E maikes me hill."

When Thomas had gone I went to the window. The man stood beside the church-railing with both hands on the gate, but I hastily retreated to my easel again, sickened and horrified, for I saw that the middle finger of his right hand was missing.

At nine o'clock Tessie appeared and vanished behind the screen with a merry "Good morning, Mr. Scott." When she had reappeared and taken her pose upon the model-stand I started a new canvas much to her delight. She remained silent as long as I was on the drawing, but as soon as the scrape of the charcoal ceased and I took up my fixative she began to chatter.

"Oh, I had such a lovely time last night. We went to Tony Pastor's."

"Who are 'we'?" I demanded.

"Oh, Maggie, you know, Mr. Whyte's model, and Pinkie McCormack—we call her Pinkie because she's got that beautiful red hair you artists like so much—and Lizzie Burke."

I sent a shower of spray from the fixative over the canvas, and said: "Well, go on."

"We saw Kelly and Baby Barnes the skirt-dancer and—and all the rest. I made a mash."

"Then you have gone back on me, Tessie?"

She laughed and shook her head.

"He's Lizzie Burke's brother, Ed. He's a perfect gen'l'man."

I felt constrained to give her some parental advice concerning mashing, which she took with a bright smile.

"Oh, I can take care of a strange mash," she said, examining her chewing gum, "but Ed is different. Lizzie is my best friend."

Then she related how Ed had come back from the stocking mill in Lowell, Massachusetts, to find her and Lizzie grown up, and what an accomplished young man he was, and how he thought nothing of squandering half a dollar for ice-cream and oysters to celebrate his entry as a clerk into the woollen department of Macy's. Before she finished I began to paint, and she resumed the pose, smiling and chattering like a sparrow. By noon I had the study fairly well rubbed in and Tessie came to look at it.

"That's better," she said.

I thought so too, and ate my lunch with a satisfied feeling that all was going well. Tessie spread her lunch on a drawing table opposite me and we drank our claret from the same bottle and lighted our cigarettes from the same match. I was very much attached to Tessie. I had watched her shoot up into a slender but exquisitely formed woman from a frail, awkward child. She had posed for me during the last three years, and among all my models she was my favorite. It would have troubled me very much indeed had she become "tough" or "fly," as the phrase goes, but I never noticed any deterioration of her manner, and felt at heart that she was all right. She and I never discussed morals at all, and I had no intention of doing so, partly because I had none myself, and partly because I knew she would do what she liked in spite of me. Still I did hope she would steer clear of complications, because I wished her well, and then also I had a selfish desire to retain the best model I had. I knew that mashing, as she termed it, had no significance with girls like Tessie, and that such things in America did not resemble in the least the same things in Paris. Yet having lived with my eyes open, I also knew that somebody would take Tessie away some day, in one manner or another, and though I professed to myself that marriage was nonsense, I sincerely hoped that, in this case, there would be a priest at the end of the vista. I am a Catholic. When I listen to high mass, when I sign myself, I feel that everything, including myself, is more cheerful, and when I confess, it does me good. A man who lives as much alone as I do, must confess to somebody. Then, again, Sylvia was Catholic, and it was reason enough for me. But I was speaking of Tessie, which is very different. Tessie also was Catholic and much more devout than I, so, taking it all in all, I had little fear for my pretty model until she should fall in love. But *then* I knew that fate alone would decide her future for her, and I prayed inwardly that fate would keep her away from men like me and throw into her path nothing but Ed Burkes and Jimmy McCormacks, bless her sweet face!

Tessie sat blowing rings of smoke up to the ceiling and tinkling the ice in her tumbler.

"Do you know that I also had a dream last night?" I observed.

"Not about that man," she laughed.

"Exactly. A dream similar to yours, only much worse."

It was foolish and thoughtless of me to say this, but you know how little tact the average painter has.

"I must have fallen asleep about 10 o'clock," I continued, "and after awhile I dreamt that I awoke. So plainly did I hear the midnight bells, the wind in the tree branches, and the whistle of steamers from the bay, that even now I can scarcely believe I was not awake. I seemed to be lying in a box which had a glass cover. Dimly I saw the street lamps as I passed, for I must tell you, Tessie, the box in which I reclined appeared to lie in a cushioned wagon which jolted me over a stony pavement. After a while I became impatient and tried to move but the box was too narrow. My hands were crossed on my breast so I could not raise them to help myself. I listened and then tried to call. My voice was gone. I could hear the trample of the horses attached to the wagon and even the breathing of the driver. Then another sound broke upon my ears like the raising of a window sash. I managed to turn my head a little, and found I could look, not only through the glass cover of my box, but also through the glass panes in the side of the covered vehicle. I saw houses, empty and silent, with neither light nor life about any of them excepting one. In that house a window was open on the first floor and a figure all in white stood looking down into the street. It was you."

Tessie had turned her face away from me and leaned on the table with her elbow.

"I could see your face," I resumed, "and it seemed to me to be very sorrowful. Then we passed on and turned into a narrow black lane. Presently the horses stopped. I waited and waited, closing my eyes with fear and impatience, but all was as silent as the grave. After what seemed to me hours, I began to feel uncomfortable. A sense that somebody was close to me made me unclose my eyes. Then I saw the white face of the hearse-driver looking at me through the coffin-lid—"

A sob from Tessie interrupted me. She was trembling like a leaf. I saw I had made an ass of myself and attempted to repair the damage.

"Why, Tess," I said, "I only told you this to show you what influence your story might have on another person's dreams. You don't suppose I really lay in a coffin, do you? What are you trembling for? Don't you see that your dream and my unreasonable dislike for that inoffensive watchman of the church simply set my brain working as soon as I fell asleep?"

She laid her head between her arms and sobbed as if her heart would break. What a precious triple donkey I had made of myself! But I was about to break my record. I went over and put my arm about her.

"Tessie, dear, forgive me," I said; "I had no business to frighten you with such nonsense. You are too sensible a girl, too good a Catholic to believe in dreams."

Her hand tightened on mine and her head fell back upon my shoulder, but she still trembled and I petted and comforted her.

"Come, Tess, open your eyes and smile."

Her eyes opened with a slow languid movement and met mine, but their expression was so queer that I hastened to reassure her again.

"It's all humbug, Tessie, you surely are not afraid that any harm will come to you because of that."

"No," she said, but her scarlet lips quivered.

"Then what's the matter? Are you afraid?"

"Yes. Not for myself."

"For me, then?" I demanded gayly.

"For you," she murmured in a voice almost inaudible, "I—I care for you."

At first I started to laugh, but when I understood her, a shock passed through me and I sat like one turned to stone. This was the crowning bit of idiocy I had committed. During the moment which elapsed between her reply and my answer I thought of a thousand responses to that innocent confession. I could pass it by with a laugh, I could misunderstand her and reassure her as to my health, I could simply point out that it was impossible she could love me. But my reply was quicker than my thoughts, and I might think and think now when it was too late, for I had kissed her on the mouth.

That evening I took my usual walk in Washington Park, pondering over the occurrences of the day. I was thoroughly committed. There was no back out now, and I stared the future straight in the face. I was not good, not even scrupulous, but I had no idea of deceiving either myself or Tessie. The one passion of my life lay buried in the sunlit forests of Brittany. Was it buried there forever? Hope cried "No!" For three years I had been listening to the voice of Hope, and for three years I had waited for a footstep on my threshold. Had Sylvia forgotten? "No!" cried Hope.

I said that I was not good. That is true, but still I was not exactly a comic opera villain. I had led an easy-going reckless life, taking what invited me of pleasure, deploring and sometimes bitterly regretting consequences. In one thing alone, except my painting, was I serious, and that was something which lay hidden if not lost in the Breton forests.

It was too late now for me to regret what had occurred during the day. Whatever it had been, pity, a sudden tenderness for sorrow, or the more brutal instinct of gratified vanity, it was all the same now, and unless I wished to bruise an innocent heart my path lay marked before me. The fire and strength, the depth of passion of a love which I had never even suspected, with all my imagined experience in the world, left me no alternative but to respond or send her away. Whether because I am so cowardly about giving pain to others, or whether it was that I have little of the gloomy Puritan in me, I do not know, but I shrank from disclaiming responsibility for that thoughtless kiss, and in fact had no time to do so before the gates of her heart opened and the flood poured forth. Others who habitually do their duty and find a sullen satisfaction in making themselves and everybody else unhappy, might have withstood it. I did not. I dared not. After the storm had abated I did tell her that she might better have loved Ed Burke and worn a plain gold ring, but she would not hear of it, and I thought perhaps that as long as she had decided to love somebody she could not marry, it had better be me. I, at least, could treat her with an intelligent affection, and whenever she became tired of her infatuation she could go none the worse for it. For I was decided on that point although I knew how hard it would be. I remember the usual termination of Platonic liaisons and thought how disgusted I had been whenever I heard of one. I knew I was undertaking a great deal for unscrupulous a man as I was, and I dreaded the future, but never for one moment did I doubt that she was safe with me. Had it been anybody but Tessie I should not have bothered my head about scruples. For it did not occur to me to sacrifice Tessie as I would have sacrificed a woman of the world. I looked the future squarely in the face and saw the several probable endings to the affair. She would either tire of the whole thing, or become so unhappy that I should have either to marry her or go away. If I married her we would be unhappy. I with a wife unsuited to me, and she with a husband unsuitable for any woman. For my past life could scarcely entitle me to marry. If I went away she might either fall ill, recover, and marry some Eddie Burke, or she might recklessly or deliberately go and do something foolish. On the other hand if she tired of me, then her whole life would be before her with beautiful vistas of Eddie Burkes and marriage rings and twins and Harlem flats and Heaven knows what. As I strolled along through the trees by the Washington Arch, I decided that she should find a substantial friend in me anyway and the future could take care of itself. Then I went into the house and put on my evening dress for the little faintly perfumed note on my dresser said, "Have a cab at the stage door at eleven," and the note was signed "Edith Carmichel, Metropolitan Theater."

I took supper that night, or rather we took supper, Miss Carmichel and I, at Solari's and the dawn was just beginning to gild the cross on the Memorial Church as I entered Washington Square after leaving Edith at the Brunswick. There was not a soul in the park as I passed among the trees and took the walk which leads from the Garibaldi statue to the Hamilton Apartment House, but as I passed the churchyard I saw a figure sitting on the stone steps. In spite of myself a chill crept over me at the sight of the white puffy face, and I hastened to pass. Then he said something which might have been addressed to me or might merely have been a mutter to himself, but a sudden furious anger flamed up within me that such a creature should address me. For an instant I felt like wheeling about and smashing my stick over his head, but I walked on, and entering the Hamilton went to my apartment. For some time I tossed about the bed trying to get the sound of his voice out of my ears, but could not. It filled my head, that muttering sound, like thick oily smoke from a fat-rendering vat or an odor of noisome decay. And as I lay and tossed about, the voice in my ears seemed more distinct, and I began to understand the words he had muttered. They came to me slowly as if I had forgotten them, and at last I could make some sense out of the sounds. It was this:

"Have you found the Yellow Sign?"

"Have you found the Yellow Sign?"

"Have you found the Yellow Sign?"

I was furious. What did he mean by that? Then with a curse upon him and his I rolled over and went to sleep, but when I awoke later I looked pale and haggard, for I had dreamed the dream of the night before and it troubled me more than I cared to think.

I dressed and went down into my studio. Tessie sat by the window, but as I came in she rose and put both arms around my neck for an innocent kiss. She looked so sweet and dainty that I kissed her again and then sat down before the easel.

"Hello! Where's the study I began yesterday?" I asked.

Tessie looked conscious, but did not answer. I began to hunt among the piles of canvases, saying, "Hurry up, Tess, and get ready; we must take advantage of the morning light."

When at last I gave up the search among the other canvases and turned to look around the room for the missing study I noticed Tessie standing by the screen with her clothes still on.

"What's the matter," I asked, "don't you feel well?"

"Yes."

"Then hurry."

"Do you want me to pose as—as I have always posed?"

Then I understood. Here was a new complication. I had lost, of course, the best nude model I had ever seen. I looked at Tessie. Her face was scarlet. Alas! Alas! We had eaten of the tree of knowledge, and Eden and native innocence were dreams of the past—I mean for her.

I suppose she noticed the disappointment on my face, for she said: "I will pose if you wish. The study is behind the screen here where I put it."

"No," I said, "we will begin something new;" and I went into my wardrobe and picked out a Moorish costume which fairly blazed with tinsel. It was a genuine costume, and Tessie retired to the screen with it enchanted. When she came forth again I was astonished. Her long black hair was bound above her forehead with a circlet of turquoises, and the ends curled about her glittering girdle. Her feet were encased in the embroidered pointed slippers and the skirt of her costume, curiously wrought with arabesques in silver, fell to her ankles. The deep metallic blue vest embroidered with silver and the short Mauresque jacket spangled and sewn with turquoises became her wonderfully. She came up to me and held up her face smiling. I slipped my hand into my pocket and drawing out a gold chain with a cross attached, dropped it over her head.

"It's yours, Tessie."

"Mine?" she faltered.

"Yours. Now go and pose." Then with a radiant smile she ran behind the screen and presently reappeared with a little box on which was written my name.

"I had intended to give it to you when I went home to-night," she said, "but I can't wait now."

I opened the box. On the pink cotton inside lay a clasp of black onyx, on which was inlaid a curious symbol or letter in gold. It was neither Arabic nor Chinese, nor as I found afterwards did it belong to any human script.

"It's all I had to give you for a keepsake," she said, timidly.

I was annoyed, but I told her how much I should prize it, and promised to wear it always. She fastened it on my coat beneath the lapel.

"How foolish, Tess, to go and buy me such a beautiful thing as this," I said.

"I did not buy it," she laughed.

Then she told me how she had found it one day while coming from the Aquarium in the Battery, how she had advertised it and watched the papers, but at last gave up all hopes of finding the owner.

"That was last winter," she said, "the very day I had the first horrid dream about the hearse."

I remembered my dream of the previous night but said nothing, and presently my charcoal was flying over a new canvas, and Tessie stood motionless on the model stand.

III

The day following was a disastrous one for me. While moving a framed canvas from one easel to another my foot slipped on the polished floor and I fell heavily on both wrists. There were so badly sprained that it was useless to attempt to hold a brush, and I was obliged to wander about the studio, glaring at unfinished drawings and sketches until despair seized me and I sat down to smoke and twiddle my thumbs with rage. The rain blew against the windows and rattled on the roof of the church, driving me into a nervous fit with its interminable patter. Tessie sat sewing by the window, and every now and then raised her head and looked at me with such innocent compassion that I began to feel ashamed of my irritation and looked about for something to occupy me. I had read all the papers and all the books in the library, but for the sake of something to do I went to the bookcases and shoved them open with my elbow. I knew every volume by its color and examined them all, passing slowly around the library and whistling to keep up my spirits. I was turning to go into the dining-room when my eye fell upon a book bound in serpent skin, standing in a corner of the top shelf of the last bookcase. I did not remember it and from the floor could not decipher the pale lettering on the back, so I went to the smoking-room and called Tessie. She came in from the studio and climbed up to reach the book.

"What is it?" I asked.

"'The King in Yellow.'"

I was dumfounded. Who had placed it there? How came it in my rooms? I had long ago decided that I should never open that book, and nothing on earth could have persuaded me to buy it. Fearful lest curiosity might tempt me to open it, I had never even looked at it in book-stores. If I ever had had any curiosity to read it, the awful tragedy of young Castaigne, whom I knew, prevented me from exploring its wicked pages. I had always refused to listen to any description of it, and indeed, nobody ever ventured to discuss the second part aloud, so I had absolutely no knowledge of what those leaves might reveal. I stared at the poisonous mottled binding as I would at a snake.

"Don't touch it, Tessie," I said; "come down."

Of course my admonition was enough to arouse her curiosity, and before I could prevent it she took the book and, laughing, danced off into the studio with it. I called to her but she slipped away with a tormenting smile at my helpless hands, and I followed her with some impatience.

"Tessie!" I cried, entering the library, "listen, I am serious. Put that book away. I do not wish you to open it!" The library was empty. I went into both drawing-rooms, then into the bedrooms, laundry, kitchen, and finally returned to the library and began a systematic search. She had hidden herself so well that it was half an hour later when I discovered her crouching white and silent by the latticed window in the store-room above. At first glance I saw she had been punished for her foolishness. "The King in Yellow" lay at her feet, but the book was open at the second part. I looked at Tessie and saw it was too late. She had opened "The King in Yellow." Then I took her by the hand and led her into the studio. She seemed dazed, and when I told her to lie down on the sofa she obeyed me without a word. After a while she closed her eyes and her breathing became regular and deep, but I could not determine whether or not she slept. For a long while I sat silently beside her, but she neither stirred nor spoke, and at last I rose and entering the unused store-room took the book in my least injured hand. It seemed heavy as lead, but I carried it into the studio again; and sitting down on the rug beside the sofa, opened it and read it through from beginning to end.

When, faint with the excess of my emotions, I dropped the volume and leaned wearily back against the sofa, Tessie opened her eyes and looked at me.

* * *

We had been speaking for some time in a dull monotonous strain before I realized that we were discussing "The King in Yellow." Oh the sin of writing such words,—words which are clear as crystal, limpid and musical as bubbling springs, words which sparkle and glow like the poisoned diamonds of the Medicis! Oh the wickedness, the hopeless damnation of a soul who could fascinate and paralyze human creatures with such words,—words understood by the ignorant and wise alike, words which are more precious than jewels, more soothing than music, more awful than death!

We talked on, unmindful of the gathering shadows, and she was begging me to throw away the clasp of black onyx quaintly inlaid with what we now knew to be the Yellow Sign. I never shall know why I refused, though even at this hour, here in my bedroom as I write this confession, I should be glad to know *what* it was that prevented me from tearing the Yellow Sign from my breast and casting it into the fire. I am sure I wished to do so, and yet Tessie pleaded with me in vain. Night fell and the hours dragged on, but still we murmured to each other of the

King and the Pallid Mask, and midnight sounded from the misty spires in the fog-wrapped city. We spoke of Hastur and of Cassilda, while outside the fog rolled against the blank window-panes as the cloud waves roll and break on the shores of Hali.

The house was very silent now and not a sound came up from the misty streets. Tessie lay among the cushions, her face a gray blot in the gloom, but her hands were clasped in mine and I knew that she knew and read my thoughts as I read hers, for we had understood the mystery of the Hyades and the Phantom of Truth was laid. Then as we answered each other, swiftly, silently, thought on thought, the shadows stirred in the gloom about us, and far in the distant streets we heard a sound. Nearer and nearer it came, the dull crunching wheels, nearer and yet nearer, and now, outside before the door it ceased, and I dragged myself to the window and saw a black-plumed hearse. The gate below opened and shut, and I crept shaking to my door and bolted it, but I knew no bolts, no locks, could keep that creature out who was coming for the Yellow Sign. And now I heard him moving very softly along the hall. Now he was at the door, and the bolts rotted at his touch. Now he had entered. With eyes starting from my head I peered into the darkness, but when he came into the room I did not see him. It was only when I felt him envelop me in his cold soft grasp that I cried out and struggled with deadly fury, but my hands were useless and he tore the onyx clasp from my coat and struck me full in the face. Then, as I fell, I heard Tessie's soft cry and her spirit fled: and even while falling I longed to follow her, for I knew that the King in Yellow had opened his tattered mantle and there was only God to cry to now.

I would tell more, but I cannot see what help it will be to the world. As for me I am past human help or hope. As I lie here, writing, careless even whether or not I die before I finish, I can see the doctor gathering up his powders and phials with a vague gesture to the good priest beside me, which I understand.

They will be very curious to know the tragedy—they of the outside world who write books and print millions of newspapers, but I shall write no more, and the father confessor will seal my last words with the seal of sanctity when his holy office is done. They of the outside world may send their creatures into wrecked homes and death-smitten firesides, and their newspapers will batten on blood and tears, but with me their spies must halt before the confessional. They know that Tessie is dead and that I am dying. They know how the people in the house, aroused by an infernal scream, rushed into my room and found one living and two dead, but they do not know what I shall tell them now; they do not know that the doctor said as he pointed to a horrible decomposed heap on the floor—

the livid corpse of the watchman from the church: "I have no theory, no explanation. That man must have been dead for months!"

* * *

I think I am dying. I wish the priest would— ❋

The Demoiselle d'Ys

Mais je croy que je
Suis descendu on puiz
Tenebreux onquel disoit
Heraclytus estre Verité cachée.

There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not:

The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.

I

The utter desolation of the scene began to have its effect; I sat down to face the situation and, if possible, recall to mind some landmark which might aid me in extricating myself from my present position. If I could only find the ocean again all would be clear, for I knew one could see the island of Groix from the cliffs.

I laid down my gun, and kneeling behind a rock lighted my pipe. Then I looked at my watch. It was nearly four o'clock. I might have wandered far from Kerselec since daybreak.

Standing the day before on the cliffs below Kerselec with Goulven, looking out over the sombre moors among which I had now lost my way, these downs had appeared to me level as a meadow, stretching to the horizon, and although I knew how deceptive is distance, I could not realize that what from Kerselec seemed to be mere grassy hollows were great valleys covered with gorse and heather, and what looked like scattered boulders were in reality enormous cliffs of granite.

"It's a bad place for a stranger," old Goulven had said; "you'd better take a guide;" and I had replied, "I shall not lose myself." Now I knew that I had lost myself, as I sat there smoking, with the sea-wind blowing in my face. On every side stretched the moorland, covered with flowering gorse and heath and granite boulders. There was not a tree in sight, much less a house. After a while, I picked up the gun, and turning my back on the sun tramped on again.

There was little use in following any of the brawling streams which every now and then crossed my path, for, instead of flowing into the sea, they ran inland to reedy pools in the hollows of the moors. I had followed several, but they all led me to swamps or silent little ponds from which the snipe rose peeping and wheeled away in an ecstasy of fright. I began to feel fatigued, and the gun galled my shoulder in spite of the double pads. The sun sank lower and lower, shining level across yellow gorse and the moorland pools.

As I walked my own gigantic shadow led me on, seeming to lengthen at every step. The gorse scraped against my leggings, crackled beneath my feet, showering the brown earth with blossoms, and the brake bowed and billowed along my path. From tufts of heath rabbits scurried away through the bracken, and among the swamp grass I heard the wild duck's drowsy quack. Once a fox stole across my path, and again, as I stooped to drink at a hurrying rill, a heron flapped heavily from the reeds beside me. I turned to look at the sun. It seemed to touch the edges of the plain. When at last I decided that it was useless to go on, and that I must make up my mind to spend at least one night on the moors, I threw myself down thoroughly fagged out. The evening sunlight slanted warm across my body, but the sea-winds began to rise, and I felt a chill strike through me from my wet shooting-boots. High overhead gulls were wheeling and tossing like bits of white paper; from some distant marsh a solitary curlew called. Little by little the sun sank into the plain, and the zenith flushed with the after-glow. I watched the sky change from palest gold to pink and then to smouldering fire. Clouds of midges danced above me, and high in the calm air a bat dipped and soared. My eyelids began to droop. Then as I shook off the drowsiness a sudden crash among the bracken roused me. I raised my eyes. A great bird hung quivering in the air above my face. For an instant I stared, incapable of motion; then something leaped past me in the ferns and the bird rose, wheeled, and pitched headlong into the brake.

I was on my feet in an instant peering through the gorse. There came the sound of a struggle from a bunch of heather close by, and then all was quiet. I stepped forward, my gun poised, but when I came to the heather the gun fell under my arm again, and I stood motionless in silent astonishment. A dead hare lay on the ground, and on the hare stood a magnificent falcon, one talon buried in the creature's neck, the other planted firmly on its limp flank. But what astonished me, was not the mere sight of a falcon sitting upon its prey. I had seen that more than once. It was that the falcon was fitted with a sort of leash about both talons, and from the leash hung a round bit of metal like a sleigh-bell. The bird turned its fierce yellow eyes on me, and then stooped and struck its curved beak into the quarry. At the same instant hurried steps sounded among the heather, and a girl sprang into the covert in front. Without a glance at me she walked up to the falcon, and passing her gloved hand under its breast, raised it from the quarry. Then she deftly slipped a small hood over the bird's head, and holding it out on her gauntlet, stooped and picked up the hare.

She passed a cord about the animal's legs and fastened the end of the thong to her girdle. Then she started to retrace her steps through the covert. As she passed me I raised my cap and she acknowledged my presence with a scarcely perceptible inclination. I had been so astonished, so lost in admiration of the scene before my eyes, that it had not occurred to me that here was my salvation. But as she moved away I recollected that unless I wanted to sleep on a windy moor that night I had better recover my speech without delay. At my first word she hesitated, and as I stepped before her I thought a look of fear came into her beautiful eyes. But as I humbly explained my unpleasant plight, her face flushed and she looked at me in wonder.

"Surely you did not come from Kerselec!" she repeated.

Her sweet voice had no trace of the Breton accent nor of any accent which I knew, and yet there was something in it I seemed to have heard before, something quaint and indefinable, like the theme of an old song.

I explained that I was an American, unacquainted with Finistère, shooting there for my own amusement.

"An American," she repeated in the same quaint musical tones. "I have never before seen an American."

For a moment she stood silent, then looking at me she said: "If you should walk all night you could not reach Kerselec now, even if you had a guide."

This was pleasant news.

"But," I began, "if I could only find a peasant's hut where I might get something to eat, and shelter."

The falcon on her wrist fluttered and shook its head. The girl smoothed its glossy back and glanced at me.

"Look around," she said gently. "Can you see the end of these moors? Look, north, south, east, west. Can you see anything but moorland and bracken?"

"No," I said.

"The moor is wild and desolate. It is easy to enter, but sometimes they who enter never leave it. There are no peasants' huts here."

"Well," I said "if you will tell me in which direction Kerselec lies, tomorrow it will take me no longer to go back than it has to come."

She looked at me again with an expression almost like pity.

"Ah," she said, "to come is easy and takes hours; to go is different—and may take centuries."

I stared at her in amazement but decided that I had misunderstood her. Then before I had time to speak she drew a whistle from her belt and sounded it.

"Sit down and rest," she said to me; "you have come a long distance and are tired."

She gathered up her pleated skirts and motioning me to follow picked her dainty way through the gorse to a flat rock among the ferns.

"They will be here directly," she said, and taking a seat at one end of the rock invited me to sit down on the other edge. The after-glow was beginning to fade in the sky and a single star twinkled faintly through the rosy haze. A long wavering triangle of water-fowl drifted southward over our heads and from the swamps around plover were calling.

"They are very beautiful—these moors," she said quietly.

"Beautiful, but cruel to strangers," I answered.

"Beautiful and cruel," she repeated dreamily, "beautiful and cruel."

"Like a woman," I said stupidly.

"Oh," she cried with a little catch in her breath and looked at me. Her dark eyes met mine and I thought she seemed angry or frightened.

"Like a woman," she repeated under her breath, "how cruel to say so!" Then after a pause, as though speaking aloud to herself, "how cruel for him to say that."

I don't know what sort of an apology I offered for my inane, though harmless speech, but I know that she seemed so troubled about it that I began to think I had said something very dreadful without knowing it, and remembered with horror the pitfalls and snares which the French language sets for foreigners. While I was trying to imagine what I might have said, a sound of voices came across the moor and the girl rose to her feet.

"No," she said, with a trace of a smile on her pale face, "I will not accept your apologies, Monsieur, but I must prove you wrong and that shall be my revenge. Look. Here come Hastur and Raoul."

Two men loomed up in the twilight. One had a sack across his shoulders and the other carried a hoop before him as a waiter carries a tray. The hoop was fastened with straps to his shoulders and around the edge of the circlet sat three hooded falcons fitted with tinkling bells. The girl stepped up to the falconer, and with a quick turn of her wrist transferred her falcon to the hoop where it quickly sidled off and nestled among its mates who shook their hooded heads and ruffled their feathers till the belled jesses tinkled again. The other man stepped forward and bowing respectfully took up the hare and dropped it into the game-sack.

"These are my piqueurs," said the girl turning to me with a gentle dignity. "Raoul is a good fauconnier and I shall some day make him grand veneur. Hastur is incomparable."

The two silent men saluted me respectfully.

"Did I not tell you, Monsieur, that I should prove you wrong?" she continued. "This then is my revenge, that you do me the courtesy of accepting food and shelter at my own house."

Before I could answer she spoke to the falconers who started instantly across the heath, and with a gracious gesture to me she followed. I don't know whether I made her understand how profoundly grateful I felt, but she seemed pleased to listen, as we walked over the dewy heather.

"Are you not very tired?" she asked.

I had clean forgotten my fatigue in her presence and I told her so.

"Don't you think your gallantry is a little old-fashioned," she said; and when I looked confused and humbled, she added quietly, "Oh, I like it, I like everything old-fashioned, and it is delightful to hear you say such pretty things."

The moorland around us was very still now under its ghostly sheet of mist. The plover had ceased their calling; the crickets and all the little creatures of the fields were silent as we passed, yet it seemed to me as if I could hear them beginning again far behind us. Well in advance the two tall falconers strode across the heather and the faint jingling of the hawk's bells came to our ears in distant murmuring chimes.

Suddenly a splendid hound dashed out of the mist in front, followed by another and another until half a dozen or more were bounding and leaping around the girl beside me. She caressed and quieted them with her gloved hand, speaking to them in quaint terms which I remembered to have seen in old French manuscripts.

Then the falcons on the circlet borne by the falconer ahead began to beat their wings and scream, and from somewhere out of sight the notes of a hunting-horn floated across the moor. The hounds sprang away before us and vanished in the twilight, the falcons flapped and squealed upon their perch and the girl taking up the song of the horn began to hum. Clear and mellow her voice sounded in the night air.

"Chasseur, chasseur, chassez encore,
Quittez Rosette et Jeanneton,
Tonton, tonton, tontaine, tonton,
Ou, pour, rabattre, dès l'aurore,
Que les Amours soient de planton,
Tonton, tontaine, tonton."

As I listened to her lovely voice a gray mass which rapidly grew more distinct loomed up in front, and the horn rang out joyously through the tumult of the hounds and falcons. A torch glimmered at a gate, a light streamed through an opening door, and we stepped upon a wooden bridge which trembled under our feet and rose creaking and straining behind us as we passed over the moat and into a small stone court, walled on every side. From an open doorway a man came and bending in salutation presented a cup to the girl beside me. She took the cup and touched it with her lips, then lowering it turned to me and said in a low voice, "I bid you welcome."

At that moment one of the falconers came with another cup, but before handing it to me, presented it to the girl, who tasted it. The falconer made a gesture to receive it, but she hesitated a moment and then stepping forward offered me the cup with her own hands. I felt this to be an act of extraordinary graciousness, but hardly knew what was expected of me, and did not raise it to my lips at once. The girl flushed crimson. I saw that I must act quickly.

"Mademoiselle," I faltered, "a stranger whom you have saved from dangers he may never realize, empties this cup to the gentlest and loveliest hostess of France."

"In His name," she murmured, crossing herself as I drained the cup. Then stepping into the doorway she turned to me with a pretty gesture and taking my hand in hers, led me into the house, saying again and again: "You are very welcome, indeed you are welcome to the Château d'Ys."

II

I awoke next morning with the music of the horn in my ears, and leaping out of the ancient bed, went to a curtained window where the sunlight filtered through little deep-set panes. The horn ceased as I looked into the court below.

A man who might have been brother to the two falconers of the night before stood in the midst of a pack of hounds. A curved horn was strapped over his back, and in his hand he held a long-lashed whip. The dogs whined and yelped, dancing around him in anticipation; there was the stamp of horses too in the walled yard.

"Mount!" cried a voice in Breton, and with a clatter of hoofs the two falconers, with falcons upon their wrists, rode into the courtyard among the hounds. Then I heard another voice which sent the blood throbbing through my heart: "Piriou Louis, hunt the hounds well and spare neither spur nor whip. Thou Raoul and thou Gaston, see that the *epervier* does not prove himself *niais,* and if it be best in your judgment, *faites courtoisie à l'oiseau. Jardiner un oiseau* like the *mué* there on Hastur's wrist is not difficult, but thou, Raoul, mayest not find it so simple to govern that *hagard.* Twice last week he foamed *au vif* and lost the *beccade* although he is used to the *leurre.* The bird acts like a stupid *branchier. Paître un hagard n'est pas si facile.*"

Was I dreaming? The old language of falconry which I had read in yellow manuscripts—the old forgotten French of the middle ages was sounding in my ears while the hounds bayed and the hawk's bells tinkled accompaniment to the stamping horses. She spoke again in the sweet forgotten language:

"If you would rather attach the *longe* and leave thy *hagard au bloc*, Raoul, I shall say nothing; for it were a pity to spoil so fair a day's sport with an ill-trained *sors. Essimer abaisser*,—it is possibly the best way. *Ça lui donnera des reins*. I was perhaps hasty with the bird. It takes time to pass *à la filière* and the exercises *d'escap*."

Then the falconer Raoul bowed in his stirrups and replied: "If it be the pleasure of Mademoiselle, I shall keep the hawk."

"It is my wish," she answered. "Falconry I know, but you have yet to give me many a lesson in *Autourserie,* my poor Raoul. Sieur Piriou Louis, mount!"

The huntsman sprang into an archway and in an instant returned, mounted upon a strong black horse, followed by a piqueur also mounted.

"Ah!" she cried joyously, "speed Glemarec René! speed! speed all! Sound thy horn Sieur Piriou!"

The silvery music of the hunting-horn filled the courtyard, the hounds sprang through the gateway and galloping hoof-beats plunged out of the paved court; loud on the drawbridge, suddenly muffled, then lost in the heather and bracken of the moors. Distant and more distant sounded the horn, until it became so faint that the sudden carol of a soaring lark drowned it in my ears. I heard the voice below responding to some call from within the house.

"I do not regret the chase, I will go another time. Courtesy to the stranger, Pelagie, remember!"

And a feeble voice came quavering from within the house, "*Courtoisie.*"

I stripped, and rubbed myself from head to foot in the huge earthen basin of icy water which stood upon the stone floor at the foot of my bed. Then I looked about for my clothes. They were gone, but on a settle near the door lay a heap of garments which I inspected with astonishment. As my clothes had vanished I was compelled to attire myself in the costume which had evidently been placed there for me to wear while my own clothes dried. Everything was there, cap, shoes, and hunting doublet of silvery gray homespun; but the close-fitting costume and seamless shoes belonged to another century, and I remembered the strange costumes of the three falconers in the courtyard. I was sure that it was not the modern dress of any portion of France or Brittany; but not until I was dressed and stood before a mirror between the windows did I realize that I was clothed much more like a young huntsman of the middle ages than like a Breton of that day. I hesitated and picked up the cap. Should I go down and present myself in that strange guise? There seemed to be no help for it, my own clothes were gone and there was no bell in the ancient chamber to call a servant, so I contented myself with removing a short hawk's feather from the cap, and opening the door went downstairs.

By the fireplace in the large room at the foot of the stairs an old Breton woman sat spinning with a distaff. She looked up at me when I appeared, and smiling frankly, wished me health in the Breton language, to which I laughingly replied in French. At the same moment my hostess appeared and returned my salutation with a grace and dignity that sent a thrill to my heart. Her lovely head with its dark curly hair was crowned with a head-dress which set all doubts as to the epoch of my own costume at rest. Her slender figure was exquisitely set off in the homespun hunting-gown edged with silver, and on her gauntlet-covered wrist she bore one of her petted hawks. With perfect simplicity she took my hand and led me into the garden in the court, and seating herself before a table invited me very sweetly to sit beside her. Then she asked me in her soft quaint accent how I had passed the night and whether I was very much inconvenienced by wearing the clothes which old Pelagie had put there for me while I slept. I looked at my own clothes and shoes, drying in the sun by the garden-wall, and hated them. What horrors they were compared with the graceful costume which I now wore! I told her this laughing, but she agreed with me very seriously.

"We will throw them away," she said in a quiet voice. In my astonishment I attempted to explain that I not only could not think of accepting clothes from anybody, although for all I knew it might be the custom of hospitality in that part of the country, but that I should cut an impossible figure if I returned to France clothed as I was then.

She laughed and tossed her pretty head, saying something in old French which I did not understand, and the Pelagie trotted out with a tray on which stood two bowls of milk, a loaf of white bread, fruit, a platter of honeycomb, and a flagon of deep red wine. "You see I have not yet broken my fast because I wished you to eat with me. But I am very hungry," she smiled.

"I would rather die than forget one word of what you have said!" I blurted out while my cheeks burned. "She will think me mad," I added to myself, but she turned to me with sparking eyes.

"Ah!" she murmured. "Then Monsieur knows all that there is of chivalry—"

She crossed herself and broke bread—I sat and watched her white hands, not daring to raise my eyes to hers.

"Will you not eat," she asked; "why do you look so troubled?"

Ah, why? I knew it now. I knew I would give my life to touch with my lips those rosy palms—I understood now that from the moment when I looked into her dark eyes there on the moor last night I had loved her. My great and sudden passion held me speechless.

"Are you ill at ease?" she asked again.

Then like a man who pronounces his own doom I answered in a low voice: "Yes, I am ill at ease for love of you." And as she did not stir nor answer, the same power moved my lips in spite of me and I said, "I, who am unworthy of the lightest of your thoughts, I who abuse hospitality and repay your gently courtesy with bold presumption, I love you."

She leaned her head upon her hands, and answered softly, "I love you. Your words are very dear to me. I love you."

"Then I shall win you."

"Win me," she replied.

But all the time I had been sitting silent, my face turned toward her. She also silent, her sweet face resting on her upturned palm, sat facing me, and as her eyes looked into mine, I knew that neither she nor I had spoken human speech; but I knew that her soul had answered mine, and I drew myself up feeling youth and joyous love coursing through every vein. She, with a bright color in her lovely face, seemed as one awakened from a dream, and her eyes sought mine with a questioning glance which made me tremble with delight. We broke our fast, speaking of ourselves. I told her my name and she told me hers, the Demoiselle Jeanne d'Ys.

She spoke of her father and mother's death, and how the nineteen of her years had been passed in the little fortified farm alone with her nurse Pelagie. Glemarec Renè the piqueur, and the four falconers, Raoul, Gaston, Hastur, and the Sieur Piriou Louis, who had served her father. She had never been outside the moorland—never even had seen a human soul before, except the falconers and Pelagie. She did not know how she had heard of Kerselec; perhaps the falconers had spoken of it. She knew the legends of Loup Garou and Jeanne la Flamme from her nurse Pelagie. She embroidered and spun flax. Her hawks and hounds were her only distraction. When she had met me there on the moor she had been so frightened that she almost dropped at the sound of my voice. She had, it was true, seen ships at sea from the cliffs, but as far as the eye could reach the moors over which she galloped were destitute of any sign of human life. There was a legend which old Pelagie told, how anybody once lost in the unexplored moorland might never return, because the moors were enchanted. She did not know whether it was true, she never had thought about it until she met me. She did not know whether the falconers had even been outside or whether they could go if they would. The books in the house which Pelagie the nurse had taught her to read were hundreds of years old.

All this she told me with a sweet seriousness seldom seen in any one but children. My own name she found easy to pronounce and insisted, because my first name was Philip, I must have French blood in me. She did not seem curious to learn anything about the outside world, and I thought perhaps she considered it had forfeited her interest and respect from the stories of her nurse.

We were still sitting at the table and she was throwing grapes to the small field birds which came fearlessly to our very feet.

I began to speak in a vague way of going, but she would not hear of it, and before I knew it I had promised to stay a week and hunt with hawk and hound in their company. I also obtained permission to come again from Kerselec and visit her after my return.

"Why," she said innocently, "I do not know what I should do if you never came back;" and I, knowing that I had no right to awaken her with the sudden shock which the avowal of my own love would bring to her, sat silent, hardly daring to breathe.

"You will come very often?" she asked.

"Very often,"I said.

"Every day?"

"Every day."

"Oh," she sighed, "I am very happy—come and see my hawks."

She rose and took my hand again with a childlike innocence of possession, and we walked through the garden and fruit trees to a grassy lawn which was bordered by a brook. Over the lawn were scattered fifteen or twenty stumps of trees—partially imbedded in the grass—and upon all of these except two sat falcons. They were attached to the stumps by thongs which were in turn fastened with steel rivets to their legs just above the talons. A little stream of pure spring water flowed in a winding course within easy distance of each perch.

The birds set up a clamor when the girl appeared, but she went from one to another caressing some, taking others for an instant upon her wrist, or stooping to adjust their jesses.

"Are they not pretty?" she said. "See, here is a falcon-gentil. We call it 'ignoble,' because it takes the quarry in direct chase. This is a blue falcon. In falconry we call it 'noble' because it rises over the quarry, and wheeling, drops upon it from above. This white bird is a gerfalcon from the north. It is also 'noble!' Here is a merlin, and this tiercelet is a falcon-heroner."

I asked her how she had learned the old language of falconry. She did not remember, but thought her father must have taught it to her when she was very young.

Then she led me away and showed me the young falcons still in the nest. "They are termed *niais* in falconry," she explained. "A *branchier* is the young bird which is just able to leave the nest and hop from branch to branch. A young bird which has not yet moulted is called a *sors,* and a *mué* is a hawk which has moulted in captivity. When we catch a wild falcon which has changed its plumage we term it a *hagard.* Raoul first taught me to dress a falcon. Shall I teach you how it is done?"

She seated herself on the bank of the stream among the falcons and I threw myself at her feet to listen.

Then the Demoiselle d'Ys held up one rosy-tipped finger and began very gravely,

"First one must catch the falcon."

"I am caught," I answered.

She laughed very prettily and told me my *dressage* would perhaps be difficult as I was noble.

"I am already tamed," I replied; "jessed and belled."

She laughed, delighted. "Oh, my brave falcon; then you will return at my call?"

"I am yours," I answered gravely.

She sat silent for a moment. Then the color heightened in her cheeks and she held up her finger again saying, "Listen; I wish to speak of falconry—"

"I listen, Countess Jeanne d'Ys."

But again she fell into the reverie, and her eyes seemed fixed on something beyond the summer clouds.

"Philip," she said at last.

"Jeanne," I whispered.

"That is all,—that is what I wished," she sighed,—"Philip and Jeanne."

She held her hand toward me and I touched it with my lips.

"Win me," she said, but this time it was the body and soul which spoke in unison.

After a while she began again: "Let us speak of falconry."

"Begin," I replied; "we have caught the falcon."

The Jeanne d'Ys took my hand in both of hers and told me how with infinite patience the young falcon was taught to perch upon the wrist, how little by little it became used to belled jesses and the *chaperon à cornette.*

"They must first have a good appetite," she said; "then little by little I reduce their nourishment which in falconry we call *pât*. When after many nights passed *au bloc* as these birds are now, I prevail upon the *hagard* to stay quietly on the wrist, then the bird is ready to be taught to come for its food. I fix the *pât* to the end of a thong or *leurre*, and teach the bird to come to me as soon as I begin to whirl the cord in circles about my head. At first I drop the *pât* when the falcon comes, and he eats the food on the ground. After a little he will learn to seize the *leurre* in motion as I whirl it around my head, or drag it over the ground. After this it is easy to teach the falcon to strike at game, always remembering to '*faire courtoisie à l'oiseau,*' that is, to allow the bird to taste the quarry."

A squeal from one of the falcons interrupted her, and she arose to adjust the *longe* which had become whipped about the *bloc,* but the bird still flapped its wings and screamed.

"What *is* the matter?" she said; "Philip, can you see?"

I looked around and at first saw nothing to cause the commotion which was now heightened by the screams and flapping of all the birds. Then my eye fell upon the flat rock beside the stream from which the girl had risen. A gray serpent was moving slowly across the surface of the bowlder, and the eyes in its flat triangular head sparkled like jet.

"A couleuvre," she said quietly.

"Is it harmless, is it not?" I asked.

She pointed to the black V-shaped figure on the neck.

"It is certain death," she said; "it is a viper."

We watched the reptile moving slowly over the smooth rock to where the sunlight fell in a broad warm patch.

I started forward to examine it, but she clung to arm crying, "Don't, Philip, I am afraid."

"For me?"

"For you, Philip,—I love you."

Then I took her in my arms and kissed her on the lips, but all I could say was: "Jeanne, Jeanne, Jeanne." And as she lay trembling on my breast, something struck my foot in the grass below, but I did not heed it. Then again something struck my ankle, and a sharp pain shot through me. I looked into the sweet face of Jeanne d'Ys and kissed her, and with all my strength lifted her in my arms and flung her from me. Then bending, I tore the viper from my ankle and set my heel upon its head. I remember feeling weak and numb,—I remember falling to the ground. Through my slowly glazing eyes I saw Jeanne's white face bending close to mine, and when the light in my eyes went out I still felt her arms about my neck, and her soft cheek against my drawn lips.

* * *

When I opened my eyes, I looked around in terror. Jeanne was gone. I saw the stream and the flat rock; I saw the crushed viper in the grass beside me, but the hawks and *blocs* had disappeared. I sprang to my feet. The garden, the fruit trees, the drawbridge and the walled court were gone. I stared stupidly at a heap of crumbling ruins, ivy-covered and gray, through which great trees had pushed their way. I crept forward, dragging my numbed foot, and as I moved, a falcon sailed from the tree-tops among the ruins, and soaring, mounting in narrowing circles, faded and vanished in the clouds above.

"Jeanne, Jeanne," I cried, but my voice died on my lips, and I fell on my knees among the weeds. And as God willed it, I, not knowing, had fallen kneeling before a crumbling shrine carved in stone for our Mother of Sorrows. I saw the sad face of the Virgin wrought in the cold stone. I saw the cross and thorns at her feet, and beneath it I read:

"PRAY FOR THE SOUL OF THE
DEMOISELLE JEANNE D'YS,
WHO DIED
IN HER YOUTH FOR LOVE OF
PHILIP, A STRANGER.
A.D. 1573."

But upon the icy slab lay a woman's glove still warm and fragrant. ❋

The Prophets' Paradise

If but the Vine and Love Abjuring Band
Are in the Prophets' Paradise to stand,
Alack, I doubt the Prophets' Paradise
Were empty as the hollow of one's hand.

The Studio

HE smiled, saying:"Seek her throughout the world."

I said, "Why tell me of the world? My world is here, between these walls and the sheet of glass above; here among gilded flagons and dull jewelled arms, tarnished frames and canvasses, black chests and high-backed chairs, quaintly carved and stained in blue and gold."

"For whom do you wait?" he said, and I answered, "When she comes I shall know her."

On my hearth a tongue of flame whispered secrets to the whitening ashes. In the street below I heard footsteps, a voice, and a song.

"For whom then do you wait?" he said, and I answered, "I shall know her."

Footsteps, a voice, and a song in the street below, and I knew the song but neither the steps nor the voice.

"Fool!" he cried, "the song is the same, the voice and steps have but changed with years!"

On the hearth a tongue of flame whispered above the whitening ashes: "Wait no more; they have passed, the steps and the voice in the street below."

Then he smiled, saying: "For whom do you wait? Seek her throughout the world!"

I answered, "My world is here between these walls and the sheet of glass above; here among gilded flagons and dull jewelled arms, tarnished frames and canvasses, black chests and high-backed chairs, quaintly carved and stained in blue and gold."

The Phantom

THE Phantom of the Past would go no further.

"If it is true," she sighed, "that you find in me a friend, let us turn back together. You will forget, here, under the summer sky."

I held her close, pleading, caressing; I seized her, white with anger, but she resisted.

"If it is true," she sighed, "that you find in me a friend, let us turn back together."

The Phantom of the Past would go no further.

The Sacrifice

I went into a field of flowers, whose petals are whiter than snow and whose hearts are pure gold.

Far afield a woman cried, "I have killed him I loved!" and from a jar she poured blood upon the flowers whose petals are whiter than snow and whose hearts are pure gold.

Far afield I followed, and on the jar I read a thousand names, while from within the fresh blood bubbled to the brim.

"I have killed him I loved!" she cried. "The world's athirst; now let it drink!" She passed, and far afield I watched her pouring blood upon the flowers whose petals are whiter than snow and whose hearts are pure gold.

Destiny

I came to the bridge which few may pass.

"Pass!" cried the keeper, but I laughed, saying, "There is time;" and he smiled and shut the gates.

To the bridge which few may pass came young and old. All were refused. Idly I stood and counted them, until, wearied of their noise and lamentations, I came again to the bridge which few may pass.

Those in the throng about the gates shrieked out, "He comes too late!" But I laughed saying, "There is time."

"Pass!" cried the keeper as I entered; then smiled and shut the gates.

The Throng

THERE, where the throng was thickest in the street, I stood with Pierrot. All eyes were turned on me.

"What are they laughing at?" I asked, but he grinned, dusting the chalk from my black cloak. "I cannot see; it must be something droll, perhaps an honest thief!"

All eyes were turned on me.

"He has robbed you of your purse!" they laughed.

"My purse!" I cried; "Pierrot—help! it is a thief!"

They laughed: "He has robbed you of your purse!"

Then Truth stepped out holding a mirror. "If he is an honest thief," cried Truth, "Pierrot shall find him with this mirror!" but he only grinned, dusting the chalk from my black cloak.

"You see," he said, "Truth is an honest thief, she brings you back your mirror."

All eyes were turned on me.

"Arrest Truth!" I cried, forgetting it was not a mirror but a purse I lost, standing with Pierrot, there, where the throng was thickest in the street.

The Jester

"WAS she fair?" I asked, but he only chuckled, listening to the bells jingling on his cap.

"Stabbed," he tittered; "think of the long journey, the days of peril, the dreadful nights! Think how he wandered, for her sake, year after year, through hostile lands, yearning for kith and kin, yearning for her!"

"Stabbed," he tittered listening to the bells jingling on his cap.

"Was she fair?" I asked, but he only snarled, muttering to the bells jingling on his cap.

"She kissed him at the gate," he tittered, "but in the hall his brother's welcome touched his heart."

"Was she fair?" I asked.

"Stabbed," he chuckled; "think of the long journey, the days of peril, the dreadful nights! Think how he wandered, for her sake, year after year, through hostile lands, yearning for kith and kin, yearning for her!

"She kissed him at the gate, but in the hall his brother's welcome touched his heart."

"Was she fair?" I asked; but he only snarled, listening to the bells jingling in his cap.

The Green Room

THE Clown turned his powdered face to the mirror.

"If to be fair is to be beautiful," he said, "who can compare with me in my white mask?"

"Who can compare with him in his white mask?" I asked of Death beside me.

"Who can compare with me?" said Death, "for I am paler still."

"You are very beautiful," sighed the Clown, turning his powdered face from the mirror.

The Love Test

"If it is true that you love," said Love, "then wait no longer. Give her these jewels which would dishonor her and so dishonor you in loving one dishonored. If it is true that you love," said Love, "then wait no longer."

I took the jewels and went to her, but she trod upon them, sobbing: "Teach me to wait,—I love you!"

"Then wait, if it is true," said Love. ❋

The Maker of Moons

TO MY FATHER

The Maker of Moons
(selections)

THE MAKER OF MOONS

97

A PLEASANT EVENING

135

Book Publication 1896

The Maker of Moons

I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation
is—And I say there is in fact no evil;
(Or if there is, I say it is just as important to you, to
the land, or to me, as anything else.)

* * *

Each is not for its own sake;
I say the whole earth, and all the stars in the sky, are
for Religion's sake.
I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough;
None has ever adored or worshipped half enough;
None has begun to think how divine he himself is, and
how certain the future is.

WALT WHITMAN

I have heard what the Talkers were talking,—the talk
Of the beginning and the end;
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

I

Concerning Yue-Laou and the Xin I know nothing more than you shall know. I am miserably anxious to clear the matter up. Perhaps what I write may save the United States Government money and lives, perhaps it may arouse the scientific world to action; at any rate it will put an end to the terrible suspense of two people. Certainty is better than suspense.

If the Government dares to disregard this warning and refuses to send a thoroughly equipped expedition at once, the people of the State may take swift vengeance on the whole region and leave a blackened devastated waste where to-day forest and flowering meadow land border the lake in the Cardinal Woods.

You already know part of the story; the New York papers have been full of alleged details. This much is true: Barris caught the "Shiner," red handed, or rather yellow handed, for his pockets and boots and dirty fists were stuffed with lumps of gold. I say gold, advisedly. You may call it what you please. You also know how Barris was—but unless I begin at the beginning of my own experiences you will be none the wiser after all.

On the third of August of this present year I was standing in Tiffany's, chatting with George Godfrey of the designing department. On the glass counter between us lay a coiled serpent, an exquisite specimen of chiselled gold.

"No," replied Godfrey to my question, "it isn't my work; I wish it was. Why, man, it's a masterpiece!"

"Whose?" I asked.

"Now I should be very glad to know also," said Godfrey. "We bought it from an old jay who says he lives in the country somewhere about the Cardinal Woods. That's near Starlit Lake, I believe—"

"Lake of the Stars?" I suggested.

"Some call it Starlit Lake,—it's all the same. Well, my rustic Reuben says that he represents the sculptor of this snake for all practical and business purposes. He got his price too. We hope he'll bring us something more. We have sold this already to the Metropolitan Museum."

I was leaning idly on the glass case, watching the keen eyes of the artist in precious metals as he stooped over the gold serpent.

"A masterpiece!" he muttered to himself, fondling the glittering coil; "look at the texture! whew!" But I was not looking at the serpent. Something was moving,—crawling out of Godfrey's coat pocket,—the pocket nearest to me,—something soft and yellow with crab-like legs all covered with coarse yellow hair.

"What in Heaven's name," said I, "have you got in your pocket? It's crawling out—it's trying to creep up your coat, Godfrey!"

He turned quickly and dragged the creature out with his left hand.

I shrank back as he held the repulsive object dangling before me, and he laughed and placed it on the counter.

"Did you ever see anything like that?" he demanded.

"No," said I truthfully, "and I hope I never shall again. What is it?"

"I don't know. Ask them at the Natural History Museum—they can't tell you. The Smithsonian is all at sea too. It is, I believe, the connecting link between a sea-urchin, a spider, and the devil. It looks venomous but I can't find either fangs or mouth. Is it blind? These things may be eyes but they look as if they were painted. A Japanese sculptor might have produced such an impossible beast, but it is hard to believe that God did. It looks unfinished too. I have a mad idea that this creature is only one of the parts of some larger and more grotesque organism,—it looks so lonely, so hopelessly dependent, so cursedly unfinished. I'm going to use it as a model. If I don't out-Japanese the Japs my name isn't Godfrey."

The creature was moving slowly across the glass case towards me. I drew back.

"Godfrey," I said, "I would execute a man who executed any such work as you propose. What do you want to perpetuate such a reptile for? I can stand the Japanese grotesque but I can't stand that—spider—"

"It's a crab."

"Crab or spider or blind-worm—ugh! What do you want to do it for? It's a nightmare—it's unclean!"

I hated the thing. It was the first living creature that I had ever hated.

For some time I had noticed a damp acrid odour in the air, and Godfrey said it came from the reptile.

"Then kill it and bury it," I said; "and by the way, where did it come from?"

"I don't know that either," laughed Godfrey; "I found it clinging to the box that this gold serpent was brought in. I suppose my old Reuben is responsible."

"If the Cardinal Woods are the lurking places for things like this," said I, "I am sorry that I am going to the Cardinal Woods."

"Are you?" asked Godfrey; "for the shooting?"

"Yes, with Barris and Pierpont. Why don't you kill that creature?"

"Go off on your shooting trip, and let me alone," laughed Godfrey.

I shuddered at the "crab," and bade Godfrey good-bye until December.

That night, Pierpont, Barris, and I sat chatting in the smoking-car of the Quebec Express when the long train pulled out of the Grand Central Depot. Old David had gone forward with the dogs; poor things, they hated to ride in the baggage car, but the Quebec and Northern road provides no sportsman's cars, and David and the three Gordon setters were in for an uncomfortable night.

Except for Pierpont, Barris, and myself, the car was empty. Barris, trim, stout, ruddy, and bronzed, sat drumming on the window ledge, puffing a short fragrant pipe. His gun-case lay beside him on the floor.

"When *I* have white hair and years of discretion," said Pierpont languidly, "I'll not flirt with pretty serving-maids; will you, Roy?"

"No," said I, looking at Barris.

"You mean the maid with the cap in the Pullman car?" asked Barris.

"Yes," said Pierpont.

I smiled, for I had seen it also.

Barris twisted his crisp grey moustache, and yawned.

"You children had better be toddling off to bed," he said. "That lady's-maid is a member of the Secret Service."

"Oh," said Pierpont, "one of your colleagues?"

"You might present us, you know," I said; "the journey is monotonous."

Barris had drawn a telegram from his pocket, and as he sat turning it over and over between his fingers he smiled. After a moment or two he handed it to Pierpont who read it with slightly raised eyebrows.

"It's rot,—I suppose it's cipher," he said; "I see it's signed by General Drummond—"

"Drummond, Chief of the Government Secret Service," said Barris.

"Something interesting?" I enquired, lighting a cigarette.

"Something so interesting," replied Barris, "that I'm going to look into it myself—"

"And break up our shooting trio—"

"No. Do you want to hear about it? Do you, Billy Pierpont?"

"Yes," replied that immaculate young man.

Barris rubbed the amber mouth-piece of his pipe on his handkerchief, cleared the stem with a bit of wire, puffed once or twice, and leaned back in his chair.

"Pierpont," he said, "do you remember that evening at the United States Club when General Miles, General Drummond, and I were examining that gold nugget that Captain Mahan had? You examined it also, I believe."

"I did," said Pierpont.

"Was it gold?" asked Barris, drumming on the window.

"It was," replied Pierpont.

"I saw it too," said I; "of course, it was gold."

"Professor La Grange saw it also," said Barris; "he said it was gold."

"Well?" said Pierpont.

"Well," said Barris, "it was not gold."

After a silence Pierpont asked what tests had been made.

"The usual tests," replied Barris. "The United States Mint is satisfied that it is gold, so is every jeweller who has seen it. But it is not gold,—and yet—it is gold."

Pierpont and I exchanged glances.

"Now," said I, "for Barris' usual coup-de-théâtre: what was the nugget?"

"Practically it was pure gold; but," said Barris, enjoying the situation intensely, "really it was not gold. Pierpont, what is gold?"

"Gold's an element, a metal—"

"Wrong! Billy Pierpont," said Barris coolly.

"Gold was an element when I went to school," said I.

"It has not been an element for two weeks," said Barris; "and, except General Drummond, Professor La Grange, and myself, you two youngsters are the only people, except one, in the world who know it,—or have known it."

"Do you mean to say that gold is a composite metal?" said Pierpont slowly.

"I do. La Grange has made it. He produced a scale of pure gold day before yesterday. That nugget was manufactured gold."

Could Barris be joking? Was this a colossal hoax? I looked at Pierpont. He muttered something about that settling the silver question, and turned his head to Barris, but there was that in Barris' face which forbade jesting, and Pierpont and I sat silently pondering.

"Don't ask me how it's made," said Barris, quietly; "I don't know. But I do know that somewhere in the region of the Cardinal Woods there is a gang of people who do know how gold is made, and who make it. You understand the danger this is to every civilized nation. It's got to be stopped of course. Drummond and I have decided that I am the man to stop it. Wherever and whoever these people are—these gold-makers,—they must be caught, every one of them,—caught or shot."

"Or shot," repeated Pierpont, who was owner of the Cross-Cut Gold Mine and found his income too small; "Professor La Grange will of course be prudent;—science need not know things that would upset the world!"

"Little Willy," said Barris laughing, "your income is safe."

"I suppose," said I, "some flaw in the nugget gave Professor La Grange the tip."

"Exactly. He cut the flaw out before sending the nugget to be tested. He worked on the flaw and separated gold into its three elements."

"He is a great man," said Pierpont, "but he will be the greatest man in the world if he can keep his discovery to himself."

"Who?" said Barris.

"Professor La Grange."

"Professor La Grange was shot through the heart two hours ago," replied Barris slowly.

II

We had been at the shooting box in the Cardinal Woods five days when a telegram was brought to Barris by a mounted messenger from the nearest telegraph station, Cardinal Springs, a hamlet on the lumber railroad which joins the Quebec and Northern at Three Rivers Junction, thirty miles below.

Pierpont and I were sitting out under the trees, loading some special shells as experiments; Barris stood beside us, bronzed, erect, holding his pipe carefully so that no sparks should drift into our powder box. The beat of hoofs over the grass aroused us, and when the lank messenger drew bridle before the door, Barris stepped forward and took the sealed telegram. When he had torn it open he went into the house and presently reappeared, reading something that he had written.

"This should go at once," he said, looking the messenger full in the face.

"At once, Colonel Barris," replied the shabby countryman.

Pierpont glanced up and I smiled at the messenger who was gathering his bridle and settling himself in his stirrups. Barris handed him the written reply and nodded good-bye: there was a thud of hoofs on the greensward, a jingle of bit and spur across the gravel, and the messenger was gone. Barris' pipe went out and he stepped to windward to relight it.

"It is queer," said I, "that your messenger—a battered native,—should speak like a Harvard man."

"He is a Harvard man," said Barris.

"And the plot thickens," said Pierpont; "are the Cardinal Woods full of your Secret Service men, Barris?"

"No," replied Barris, "but the telegraph stations are. How many ounces of shot are you using, Roy?"

I told him, holding up the adjustable steel measuring cup. He nodded. After a moment or two he sat down on a camp-stool beside us and picked up a crimper.

"That telegram was from Drummond," he said; "the messenger was one of my men as you two bright little boys divined. Pooh! If he had spoken the Cardinal County dialect you wouldn't have known."

"His make-up was good," said Pierpont.

Barris twirled the crimper and looked at the pile of loaded shells. Then he picked up one and crimped it.

"Let 'em alone," said Pierpont, "you crimp too tight."

"Does his little gun kick when the shells are crimped too tight?" enquired Barris tenderly; "well, he shall crimp his own shells then,—where's his little man?"

"His little man" was a weird English importation, stiff, very carefully scrubbed, tangled in his aspirates, named Howlett. As valet, gilly, gun-bearer, and crimper, he aided Pierpont to endure the ennui of existence, by doing for him everything except breathing. Lately, however, Barris' taunts had driven Pierpont to do a few things for himself. To his astonishment he found that cleaning his own gun was not a bore, so he timidly loaded a shell or two, was much pleased with himself, loaded some more, crimped them, and went to breakfast with an appetite. So when Barris asked where "his little man" was, Pierpont did not reply but dug a cupful of shot from the bag and poured it solemnly into the half filled shell.

Old David came out with the dogs and of course there was a pow-wow when "Voyou," my Gordon, wagged his splendid tail across the loading table and sent a dozen unstopped cartridges rolling over the grass, vomiting powder and shot.

"Give the dogs a mile or two," said I; "we will shoot over the Sweet Fern Covert about four o'clock, David."

"Two guns, David," added Barris.

"Are you not going?" asked Pierpont, looking up, as David disappeared with the dogs.

"Bigger game," said Barris shortly. He picked up a mug of ale from the tray which Howlett had just set down beside us and took a long pull. We did the same, silently. Pierpont set his mug on the turf beside him and returned to his loading.

We spoke of the murder of Professor La Grange, of how it had been concealed by the authorities in New York at Drummond's request, of the certainty that it was one of the gang of gold-makers who had done it, and of the possible alertness of the gang.

"Oh, they know that Drummond will be after them sooner or later," said Barris, "but they don't know that the mills of the gods have already begun to grind. Those smart New York papers builded better than they knew when their ferret-eyed reporter poked his red nose into the house on 58th Street and sneaked off with a column on his cuffs about the 'suicide' of Professor La Grange. Billy Pierpont, my revolver is hanging in your room; I'll take yours too—"

"Help yourself," said Pierpont.

"I shall be gone over night," continued Barris; "my poncho and some bread and meat are all I shall take except the 'barkers.'"

"Will they bark to-night?" I asked.

"No, I trust not for several weeks yet. I shall nose about a bit. Roy, did it ever strike you how queer it is that this wonderfully beautiful country should contain no inhabitants?"

"It's like those splendid stretches of pools and rapids which one finds on every trout river and in which one never finds a fish," suggested Pierpont.

"Exactly,—and Heaven alone knows why," said Barris; "I suppose this country is shunned by human beings for the same mysterious reasons."

"The shooting is the better for it," I observed.

"The shooting is good," said Barris, "have you noticed the snipe on the meadow by the lake? Why it's brown with them! That's a wonderful meadow."

"It's a natural one," said Pierpont, "no human being ever cleared that land."

"Then it's supernatural," said Barris; "Pierpont, do you want to come with me?"

Pierpont's handsome face flushed as he answered slowly, "It's awfully good of you,—if I may."

"Bosh," said I, piqued because he had asked Pierpont, "what use is little Willy without his man?"

"True," said Barris gravely, "you can't take Howlett, you know."

Pierpont muttered something which ended in "d—n."

"Then," said I, "there will be but one gun on the Sweet Fern Covert this afternoon. Very well, I wish you joy of your cold supper and colder bed. Take your night-gown, Willy, and don't sleep on the damp ground."

"Let Pierpont alone," retorted Barris, "you shall go next time, Roy."

"Oh, all right,—you mean when there's shooting going on?"

"And I?" demanded Pierpont, grieved.

"You too, my son; stop quarrelling! Will you ask Howlett to pack our kits—lightly mind you,—no bottles,—they clink."

"My flask doesn't," said Pierpont, and went off to get ready for a night's stalking of dangerous men.

"It is strange," said I, "that nobody ever settles in this region. How many people live in Cardinal Springs, Barris?"

"Twenty counting the telegraph operator and not counting the lumbermen; they are always changing and shifting. I have six men among them."

"Where have you no men? In the Four Hundred?"

"I have men there also,—chums of Billy's only he doesn't know it. David tells me that there was a strong flight of woodcock last night. You ought to pick up some this afternoon."

Then we chatted about alder-cover and swamp until Pierpont came out of the house and it was time to part.

"Au revoir," said Barris, buckling on his kit, "come along, Pierpont, and don't walk in the damp grass."

"If you are not back by to-morrow noon," said I, "I will take Howlett and David and hunt you up. You say your course is due north?"

"Due north," replied Barris, consulting his compass.

"There is a trail for two miles and a spotted lead for two more," said Pierpont.

"Which we won't use for various reasons," added Barris pleasantly; "don't worry, Roy, and keep your confounded expedition out of the way; there's no danger."

He knew, of course, what he was talking about and I held my peace.

When the tip end of Pierpont's shooting coat had disappeared in the Long Covert, I found myself standing alone with Howlett. He bore my gaze for a moment and then politely lowered his eyes.

"Howlett," said I, "take these shells and implements to the gun room, and drop nothing. Did Voyou come to any harm in the briers this morning?"

"No 'arm, Mr. Cardenhe, sir," said Howlett.

"Then be careful not to drop anything else," said I, and walked away leaving him decorously puzzled. For he had dropped no cartridges. Poor Howlett!

III

About four o'clock that afternoon I met David and the dogs at the spinney which leads into the Sweet Fern Covert. The three setters, Voyou, Gamin, and Mioche, were in fine feather,—David had killed a woodcock and a brace of grouse over them that morning,—and they were thrashing about the spinney at short range when I came up, gun under arm and pipe lighted.

"What's the prospect, David," I asked, trying to keep my feet in the tangle of wagging, whining dogs; "hello, what's amiss with Mioche?"

"A brier in his foot sir; I drew it and stopped the wound but I guess the gravel's got in. If you have no objection, sir, I might take him back with me."

"It's safer," I said; "take Gamin too, I only want one dog this afternoon. What is the situation?"

"Fair sir; the grouse lie within a quarter of a mile of the oak second-growth. The woodcock are mostly on the alders. I saw any number of snipe on the meadows. There's something else in by the lake,—I can't just tell what, but the wood-duck set up a clatter when I was in the thicket and they come dashing through the wood as if a dozen foxes was snappin' at their tail feathers."

"Probably a fox," I said; "leash those dogs,—they must learn to stand it. I'll be back by dinner time."

"There is one more thing sir," said David, lingering with his gun under his arm.

"Well," said I.

"I saw a man in the woods by the Oak Covert,—at least I think I did."

"A lumberman?"

"I think not sir—at least,—do they have Chinamen among them?"

"Chinese? No. You didn't see a Chinaman in the woods here?"

"I—I think I did sir,—I can't say positively. He was gone when I ran into the covert."

"Did the dogs notice it?"

"I can't say—exactly. They acted queer like. Gamin here lay down an' whined—it may have been colic—and Mioche whimpered,—perhaps it was the brier."

"And Voyou?"

"Voyou, he was most remarkable sir, and the hair on his back stood up, I did see a groundhog makin' for a tree near by."

"Then no wonder Voyou bristled. David, your Chinaman was a stump or tussock. Take the dogs now."

"I guess it was sir; good afternoon sir," said David, and walked away with the Gordons leaving me alone with Voyou in the spinney.

I looked at the dog and he looked at me.

"Voyou!"

The dog sat down and danced with his fore feet, his beautiful brown eyes sparkling.

"You're a fraud," I said; "which shall it be, the alders or the upland? Upland? Good!—now for the grouse,—heel, my friend, and show your miraculous self-restraint."

Voyou wheeled into my tracks and followed close, nobly refusing to notice the impudent chipmunks and the thousand and one alluring and important smells which an ordinary dog would have lost no time in investigating.

The brown and yellow autumn woods were crisp with drifting heaps of leaves and twigs that crackled under foot as we turned from the spinney into the forest. Every silent little stream hurrying toward the lake was gay with painted leaves afloat, scarlet maple or yellow oak. Spots of sunlight fell upon the pools, searching the brown depths, illuminating the gravel bottom where shoals of minnows swam to and fro, and to and fro again, busy with the purpose of their little lives. The crickets were chirping in the long brittle grass on the edge of the woods, but we left them far behind in the silence of the deeper forest.

"Now!" said I to Voyou.

The dog sprang to the front, circled once, zigzagged through the ferns around us and, all in a moment, stiffened stock still, rigid as sculptured bronze. I stepped forward, raising my gun, two paces, three paces, ten perhaps, before a great cock-grouse blundered up from the brake and burst through the thicket fringe toward the deeper growth. There was a flash and puff from my gun, a crash of echoes among the low wooded cliffs, and through the faint veil of smoke something dark dropped from mid-air amid a cloud of feathers, brown as the brown leaves under foot.

"Fetch!"

Up from the ground sprang Voyou, and in a moment he came galloping back, neck arched, tail stiff but waving, holding tenderly in his pink mouth a mass of mottled bronzed feathers. Very gravely he laid the bird at my feet and crouched close beside it, his silky ears across his paws, his muzzle on the ground.

I dropped the grouse into my pocket, held for a moment a silent caressing communion with Voyou, then swung my gun under my arm and motioned the dog on.

It must have been five o'clock when I walked into a little opening in the woods and sat down to breathe. Voyou came and sat down in front of me.

"Well?" I enquired.

Voyou gravely presented one paw which I took.

"We will never get back in time for dinner," said I, "so we might as well take it easy. It's all your fault, you know. Is there a brier in your foot?—let's see,—there! it's out my friend and you are free to nose about and lick it. If you loll your tongue out you'll get it all over twigs and moss. Can't you lie down and try to pant less? No, there is no use in sniffing and looking at that fern patch, for we are going to smoke a little, doze a little, and go home by moonlight. Think what a big dinner we will have! Think of Howlett's despair when we are not in time! Think of all the stories you will have to tell to Gamin and Mioche! Think what a good dog you have been! There—you are tired old chap; take forty winks with me."

Voyou was a little tired. He stretched out on the leaves at my feet but whether or not he really slept I could not be certain, until his hind legs twitched and I knew he was dreaming of mighty deeds.

Now I may have taken forty winks, but the sun seemed to be no lower when I sat up and unclosed my lids. Voyou raised his head, saw in my eyes that I was not going yet, thumped his tail half a dozen times on the dried leaves, and settled back with a sigh.

I looked lazily around, and for the first time noticed what a wonderfully beautiful spot I had chosen for a nap. It was an oval glade in the heart of the forest, level and carpeted with green grass. The trees that surrounded it were gigantic; they formed one towering circular wall of verdure, blotting out all except the turquoise blue of the sky-oval above. And now I noticed that in the centre of the greensward lay a pool of water, crystal clear, glimmering like a mirror in the meadow grass, beside a block of granite. It scarcely seemed possible that the symmetry of tree and lawn and lucent pool could have been one of nature's accidents. I had never before seen this glade nor had I ever heard it spoken of by either Pierpont or Barris. It was a marvel, this diamond clear basin, regular and graceful as a Roman fountain, set in the gem of turf. And these great trees,—they also belonged, not in America but in some legend-haunted forest of France, where moss-grown marbles stand neglected in dim glades, and the twilight of the forest shelters fairies and slender shapes from shadow-land.

I lay and watched the sunlight showering the tangled thicket where masses of crimson Cardinal-flowers glowed, or where one long dusty sunbeam tipped the edge of the floating leaves in the pool, turning them to palest gilt. There were birds too, passing through the dim avenues of trees like jets of flame,—the gorgeous Cardinal-Bird in his deep stained crimson robe,—the bird that gave to the woods, to the village fifteen miles away, to the whole country, the name of Cardinal.

I rolled over on my back and looked up at the sky. How pale,—paler than a robin's egg,—it was. I seemed to be lying at the bottom of a well, walled with verdure, high towering on every side. And, as I lay, all about me the air became sweet scented. Sweeter and sweeter and more penetrating grew the perfume, and I wondered what stray breeze, blowing over acres of lilies, could have brought it. But there was no breeze; the air was still. A gilded fly alighted on my hand,—a honey-fly. It was as troubled as I by the scented silence.

Then, behind me, my dog growled.

I sat quite still at first, hardly breathing, but my eyes were fixed on a shape that moved along the edge of the pool among the meadow grasses. The dog had ceased growling and was now staring, alert and trembling.

At last I rose and walked rapidly down to the pool, my dog following close to heel.

The figure, a woman's, turned slowly toward us.

IV

She was standing still when I approached the pool. The forest around us was so silent that when I spoke the sound of my own voice startled me.

"No," she said,—and her voice was smooth as flowing water, "I have not lost my way. Will he come to me, your beautiful dog?"

Before I could speak, Voyou crept to her and laid his silky head against her knees.

"But surely," said I, "you did not come here alone."

"Alone? I did come alone."

"But the nearest settlement is Cardinal, probably nineteen miles from where we are standing."

"I do not know Cardinal," she said.

"Ste. Croix in Canada is forty miles at least,—how did you come into the Cardinal Woods?" I asked amazed.

"Into the woods?" she repeated a little impatiently.

"Yes."

She did not answer at first but stood caressing Voyou with gentle phrase and gesture.

"Your beautiful dog I am fond of, but I am not fond of being questioned," she said quietly. "My name is Ysonde and I came to the fountain here to see your dog."

I was properly quenched. After a moment or two I did say that in another hour it would be growing dusky, but she neither replied nor looked at me.

"This," I ventured, "is a beautiful pool,—you call it a fountain,—a delicious fountain: I have never before seen it. It is hard to imagine that nature did all this."

"Is it?" she said.

"Don't you think so?" I asked.

"I haven't thought; I wish when you go you would leave me your dog."

"My—my dog?"

"If you don't mind," she said sweetly, and looked at me for the first time in the face.

For an instant our glances met, then she grew grave, and I saw that her eyes were fixed on my forehead. Suddenly she rose and drew nearer, looking intently at my forehead. There was a faint mark there, a tiny crescent, just over my eyebrow. It was a birthmark.

"Is that a scar?" she demanded drawing nearer.

"That crescent shaped mark? No."

"No? Are you sure?" she insisted.

"Perfectly," I replied, astonished.

"A—a birthmark?"

"Yes,—may I ask why?"

As she drew away from me, I saw that the color had fled from her cheeks. For a second she clasped both hands over her eyes as if to shut out my face, then slowly dropping her hands, she sat down on a long square block of stone which half encircled the basin, and on which to my amazement I saw carving. Voyou went to her again and laid his head in her lap.

"What is your name?" she asked at length.

"Roy Cardenhe."

"Mine is Ysonde. I carved these dragon-flies on the stone, these fishes and shells and butterflies you see."

"You! They are wonderfully delicate,—but those are not American dragon-flies—"

"No—they are more beautiful. See, I have my hammer and chisel with me."

She drew from a queer pouch at her side a small hammer and chisel and held them toward me.

"You are very talented," I said, "where did you study?"

"I? I never studied,—I knew how. I saw things and cut them out of stone. Do you like them? Some time I will show you other things that I have done. If I had a great lump of bronze I could make your dog, beautiful as he is."

Her hammer fell into the fountain and I leaned over and plunged my arm into the water to find it.

"It is there, shining on the sand," she said, leaning over the pool with me.

"Where," said I, looking at our reflected faces in the water. For it was only in the water that I had dared, as yet, to look her long in the face.

The pool mirrored the exquisite oval of her head, the heavy hair, the eyes. I heard the silken rustle of her girdle, I caught the flash of a white arm, and the hammer was drawn up dripping with spray.

The troubled surface of the pool grew calm and again I saw her eyes reflected.

"Listen," she said in a low voice, "do you think you will come again to my fountain?"

"I will come," I said. My voice was dull; the noise of water filled my ears.

Then a swift shadow sped across the pool; I rubbed my eyes. Where her reflected face had bent beside mine there was nothing mirrored but the rosy evening sky with one pale star glimmering. I drew myself up and turned. She was gone. I saw the faint star twinkling above me in the afterglow, I saw the tall trees motionless in the still evening air, I saw my dog slumbering at my feet.

The sweet scent in the air had faded, leaving in my nostrils the heavy odor of fern and forest mould. A blind fear seized me, and I caught up my gun and sprang into the darkening woods. The dog followed me, crashing through the undergrowth at my side. Duller and duller grew the light, but I strode on, the sweat pouring from my face and hair, my mind a chaos. How I reached the spinney I can hardly tell. As I turned up the path I caught a glimpse of a human face peering at me from the darkening thicket,—a horrible human face, yellow and drawn with high-boned cheeks and narrow eyes.

Involuntarily I halted; the dog at my heels snarled. Then I sprang straight at it, floundering blindly through the thicket, but the night had fallen swiftly and I found myself panting and struggling in a maze of twisted shrubbery and twining vines, unable to see the very undergrowth that ensnared me.

It was a pale face, and a scratched one that I carried to a late dinner that night. Howlett served me, dumb reproach in his eyes, for the soup had been standing and the grouse was juiceless.

David brought the dogs in after they had had their supper, and I drew my chair before the blaze and set my ale on a table beside me. The dogs curled up at my feet, blinking gravely at the sparks that snapped and flew in eddying showers from the heavy birch logs.

"David," said I, "did you say you saw a Chinaman today?"

"I did sir."

"What do you think about it now?"

"I may have been mistaken sir—"

"But you think not. What sort of whiskey did you put in my flask today?"

"The usual sir."

"Is there much gone?"

"About three swallows sir, as usual."

"You don't suppose there could have been any mistake about that whiskey,—no medicine could have gotten into it for instance."

David smiled and said, "No sir."

"Well," said I, "I have had an extraordinary dream."

When I said "dream," I felt comforted and reassured. I had scarcely dared to say it before, even to myself.

"An extraordinary dream," I repeated; "I fell asleep in the woods about five o'clock, in that pretty glade where the fountain—I mean the pool is. You know the place?"

"I do not sir."

I described it minutely, twice, but David shook his head.

"Carved stone did you say sir? I never chanced on it. You don't mean the New Spring—"

"No, no! This glade is way beyond that. Is it possible that any people inhabit the forest between here and the Canada line?"

"Nobody short of Ste. Croix; at least I have no knowledge of any."

"Of course," said I, "when I thought I saw a Chinaman, it was imagination. Of course I had been more impressed than I was aware of by your adventure. Of course you saw no Chinaman, David."

"Probably not sir," replied David dubiously.

I sent him off to bed, saying I should keep the dogs with me all night; and when he was gone, I took a good long draught of ale, "just to shame the devil," as Pierpont said, and lighted a cigar. Then I thought of Barris and Pierpont, and their cold bed, for I knew they would not dare build a fire, and, in spite of the hot chimney corner and the crackling blaze, I shivered in sympathy.

"I'll tell Barris and Pierpont the whole story and take them to see the carved stone and the fountain," I thought to myself; "what a marvelous dream it was—Ysonde,—if it was a dream."

Then I went to the mirror and examined the faint white mark above my eyebrow.

V

About eight o'clock next morning, as I sat listlessly eyeing my coffee cup which Howlett was filling, Gamin and Mioche set up a howl, and in a moment more I heard Barris' step on the porch.

"Hello, Roy," said Pierpont, stamping into the dining room, "I want my breakfast by jingo! Where's Howlett,—none of your *café au lait* for me,—I want a chop and some eggs. Look at that dog, he'll wag the hinge off his tail in a moment—"

"Pierpont," said I, "this loquacity is astonishing but welcome. Where's Barris? You are soaked from neck to ankle."

Pierpont sat down and tore off his stiff muddy leggings.

"Barris is telephoning to Cardinal Springs,—I believe he wants some of his men,—down! Gamin, you idiot! Howlett, three eggs poached and more toast,—what was I saying? Oh, about Barris; he's struck something or other which he hopes will locate these gold-making fellows. I had a jolly time,—he'll tell you about it."

"Billy! Billy!" I said in pleased amazement, "you are learning to talk! Dear me! You load your own shells and you carry your own gun and you fire it yourself—hello! here's Barris all over mud. You fellows really ought to change your rig—whew! what a frightful odor!"

"It's probably this," said Barris tossing something onto the hearth where it shuddered for a moment and then began to writhe; "I found it in the woods by the lake. Do you know what it can be, Roy?"

To my disgust I saw it was another of those spidery wormy crablike creatures that Godfrey had in Tiffany's.

"I thought I recognized that acrid odor," I said; "for the love of the Saints take it away from the breakfast table, Barris!"

"But what is it?" he persisted, unslinging his field-glass and revolver.

"I'll tell you what I know after breakfast," I replied firmly. "Howlett, get a broom and sweep that thing into the road.—What are you laughing at, Pierpont?"

Howlett swept the repulsive creature out and Barris and Pierpont went to change their dew-soaked clothes for dryer raiment. David came to take the dogs for an airing and in a few minutes Barris reappeared and sat down in his place at the head of the table.

"Well," said I, "is there a story to tell?"

"Yes, not much. They are near the lake on the other side of the woods,—I mean these gold-makers. I shall collar one of them this evening. I haven't located the main gang with any certainty,—shove the toast rack this way will you, Roy,—no, I am not at all certain, but I've nailed one anyway. Pierpont was a great help, really,—and, what do you think, Roy? He wants to join the Secret Service!"

"Little Willy!"

"Exactly. Oh I'll dissuade him. What sort of a reptile was that I brought in? Did Howlett sweep it away?"

"He can sweep it back again for all I care," I said indifferently. "I've finished my breakfast."

"No," said Barris, hastily swallowing his coffee, "it's of no importance; you can tell me about the beast—"

"Serve you right if I had it brought in on toast," I returned.

Pierpont came in radiant, fresh from the bath.

"Go on with your story, Roy," he said; and I told them about Godfrey and his reptile pet.

"Now what in the name of common sense can Godfrey find interesting in that creature?" I ended, tossing my cigarette into the fireplace.

"It's Japanese, don't you think?" said Pierpont.

"No," said Barris, "it is not artistically grotesque, it's vulgar and horrible,—it looks cheap and unfinished—"

"Unfinished,—exactly," said I, "like an American humorist—"

"Yes," said Pierpont, "cheap. What about that gold serpent?"

"Oh, the Metropolitan Museum bought it; you must see it, it's marvellous."

Barris and Pierpont had lighted their cigarettes and, after a moment, we all rose and strolled out to the lawn, where chairs and hammocks were placed under the maple trees.

David passed, gun under arm, dogs heeling.

"Three guns on the meadows at four this afternoon," said Pierpont.

"Roy," said Barris as David bowed and started on, "what did you do yesterday?"

This was the question that I had been expecting. All night long I had dreamed of Ysonde and the glade in the woods, where, at the bottom of the crystal fountain, I saw the reflection of her eyes. All the morning while bathing and dressing I had been persuading myself that the dream was not worth recounting and that a search for the glade and the imaginary stone carving would be ridiculous. But now, as Barris asked the question, I suddenly decided to tell him the whole story.

"See here, you fellows," I said abruptly, "I am going to tell you something queer. You can laugh as much as you please too, but first I want to ask Barris a question or two. You have been in China, Barris?"

"Yes," said Barris, looking straight into my eyes.

"Would a Chinaman be likely to turn lumberman?"

"Have you seen a Chinaman?" he asked in a quiet voice.

"I don't know; David and I both imagined we did."

Barris and Pierpont exchanged glances.

"Have you seen one also?" I demanded, turning to include Pierpont.

"No," said Barris slowly; "but I know that there is, or has been, a Chinaman in these woods."

"The devil!" said I.

"Yes," said Barris gravely; "the devil, if you like,—a devil,—a member of the Kuen-Yuin."

I drew my chair close to the hammock where Pierpont lay at full length, holding out to me a ball of pure gold.

"Well?" said I, examining the engraving on its surface, which represented a mass of twisted creatures,—dragons, I supposed.

"Well," repeated Barris, extending his hand to take the golden ball, "this globe of gold engraved with reptiles and Chinese hieroglyphics is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin."

"Where did you get it?" I asked, feeling that something startling was impending.

"Pierpont found it by the lake at sunrise this morning. It is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin," he repeated, "the terrible Kuen-Yuin, the sorcerers of China, and the most murderously diabolical sect on earth."

We puffed our cigarettes in silence until Barris rose, and began to pace backward and forward among the trees, twisting his grey moustache.

"The Kuen-Yuin are sorcerers," he said, pausing before the hammock where Pierpont lay watching him; "I mean exactly what I say,—sorcerers. I've seen them,—I've seen them at their devilish business, and I repeat to you solemnly, that as there are angels above, there is a race of devils on earth, and they are sorcerers. Bah!" he cried, "talk to me of Indian magic and Yogis and all that clap-trap! Why, Roy, I tell you that the Kuen-Yuin have absolute control of a hundred millions of people, mind and body, body and soul. Do you know what goes on in the interior of China? Does Europe know,—could any human being conceive of the condition of that gigantic hell-pit? You read the papers, you hear diplomatic twaddle about Li-Hung-Chang and the Emperor, you see accounts of battles on sea and land, and you know that Japan has raised a toy tempest along the jagged edge of the great unknown. But you never before heard of the Kuen-Yuin; no, nor has any European except a stray missionary or two, and yet I tell you that when the fires from this pit of hell have eaten through the continent to the coast, the explosion will inundate half a world,—and God help the other half."

Pierpont's cigarette went out; he lighted another, and looked hard at Barris.

"But," resumed Barris quietly, "'sufficient unto the day,' you know,— I didn't intend to say as much as I did,—it would do no good,—even you and Pierpont will forget it,—it seems so impossible and so far away,—like the burning out of the sun. What I want to discuss is the possibility or probability of a Chinaman,—a member of the Kuen-Yuin, being here, at this moment, in the forest."

"If he is," said Pierpont, "possibly the gold-makers owe their discovery to him."

"I do not doubt it for a second," said Barris earnestly.

I took the little golden globe in my hand, and examined the characters engraved upon it.

"Barris," said Pierpont, "I can't believe in sorcery while I am wearing one of Sanford's shooting suits in the pocket of which rests an uncut volume of the 'Duchess.'"

"Neither can I," I said, "for I read the *Evening Post,* and I know Mr. Godkin would not allow it. Hello! What's the matter with this gold ball?"

"What is the matter?" said Barris grimly.

"Why—why—it's changing color—purple, no, crimson—no, it's green I mean—good Heavens! these dragons are twisting under my fingers—"

"Impossible!" muttered Pierpont, leaning over me; "those are not dragons—"

"No!" I cried excitedly; "they are pictures of that reptile that Barris brought back—see—see how they crawl and turn—"

"Drop it!" commanded Barris; and I threw the ball on the turf. In an instant we had all knelt down on the grass beside it, but the globe was again golden, grotesquely wrought with dragons and strange signs.

Pierpont, a little red in the face, picked it up, and handed it to Barris. He placed it on a chair, and sat down beside me.

"Whew!" said I, wiping the perspiration from my face, "how did you play us that trick, Barris?"

"Trick?" said Barris contemptuously.

I looked at Pierpont, and my heart sank. If this was not a trick, what was it? Pierpont returned my glance and colored, but all he said was, "It's devilish queer," and Barris answered, "Yes, devilish." Then Barris asked me again to tell my story, and I did, beginning from the time I met David in the spinney to the moment when I sprang into the darkening thicket where that yellow mask had grinned like a phantom skull.

"Shall we try to find the fountain?" I asked after a pause.

"Yes,—and—er—the lady," suggested Pierpont vaguely.

"Don't be an ass," I said a little impatiently, "you need not come, you know."

"Oh, I'll come," said Pierpont, "unless you think I am indiscreet—"

"Shut up, Pierpont," said Barris, "this thing is serious; I never heard of such a glade or such a fountain, but it's true that nobody knows this forest thoroughly. It's worth while trying for; Roy, can you find your way back to it?"

"Easily," I answered; "when shall we go?"

"It will knock our snipe shooting on the head," said Pierpont, "but then when one has the opportunity of finding a live dream-lady—"

I rose, deeply offended, but Pierpont was not very penitent and his laughter was irresistible.

"The lady's yours by right of discovery," he said. "I'll promise not to infringe on your dreams,—I'll dream about other ladies—"

"Come, come," said I, "I'll have Howlett put you to bed in a minute. Barris, if you are ready,—we can get back to dinner—"

Barris had risen and was gazing at me earnestly.

"What's the matter?" I asked nervously, for I saw that his eyes were fixed on my forehead, and I thought of Ysonde and the white crescent scar.

"Is that a birthmark?" said Barris.

"Yes—why, Barris?"

"Nothing,—an interesting coincidence—"

"What!—for Heaven's sake!"

"The scar,—or rather the birthmark. It is the print of the dragon's claw,—the crescent symbol of Yue-Laou—"

"And who the devil is Yue-Laou?" I said crossly.

"Yue-Laou,—the Moon Maker, Dzil-Nbu of the Kuen-Yuin;—it's Chinese mythology, but it is believed that Yue-Laou has returned to rule the Kuen-Yuin—"

"The conversation," interrupted Pierpont, "smacks of peacock's feathers and yellow-jackets. The chicken-pox has left its card on Roy, and Barris is guying us. Come on, you fellows, and make your call on the dream-lady. Barris, I hear galloping; here come your men."

Two mud splashed riders clattered up to the porch and dismounted at a motion from Barris. I noticed that both of them carried repeating rifles and heavy Colt's revolvers.

They followed Barris, deferentially, into the dining-room, and presently we heard the tinkle of plates and bottles and the low hum of Barris' musical voice.

Half an hour later they came out again, saluted Pierpont and me, and galloped away in the direction of the Canadian frontier. Ten minutes passed, and, as Barris did not appear, we rose and went into the house, to find him. He was sitting silently before the table, watching the small golden globe, now glowing with scarlet and orange fire, brilliant as a live coal. Howlett, mouth ajar, and eyes starting from the sockets, stood petrified behind him.

"Are you coming," asked Pierpont, a little startled. Barris did not answer. The globe slowly turned to pale gold again,—but the face that Barris raised to ours was white as a sheet. Then he stood up, and smiled with an effort which was painful to us all.

"Give me a pencil and a bit of paper," he said.

Howlett brought it. Barris went to the window and wrote rapidly. He folded the paper, placed it in the top drawer of his desk, locked the drawer, handed me the key, and motioned us to precede him.

When again we stood under the maples, he turned to me with an impenetrable expression. "You will know when to use the key," he said: "Come, Pierpont, we must try to find Roy's fountain."

VI

At two o'clock that afternoon, at Barris' suggestion, we gave up the search for the fountain in the glade and cut across the forest to the spinney where David and Howlett were waiting with our guns and the three dogs.

Pierpont guyed me unmercifully about the "dream-lady" as he called her, and, but for the significant coincidence of Ysonde's and Barris' questions concerning the white scar on my forehead, I should long ago have been perfectly persuaded that I had dreamed the whole thing. As it was, I had no explanation to offer. We had not been able to find the glade although fifty times I came to landmarks which convinced me that we were just about to enter it. Barris was quiet, scarcely uttering a word to either of us during the entire search. I had never before seen him depressed in spirits. However, when we came in sight of the spinney where a cold bit of grouse and a bottle of Burgundy awaited each, Barris seemed to recover his habitual good humor.

"Here's to the dream-lady!" said Pierpont, raising his glass and standing up.

I did not like it. Even if she was only a dream, it irritated me to hear Pierpont's mocking voice. Perhaps Barris understood,—I don't know, but he bade Pierpont drink his wine without further noise, and that young man obeyed with a childlike confidence which almost made Barris smile.

"What about the snipe, David," I asked; "the meadows should be in good condition."

"There is not a snipe on the meadows, sir," said David solemnly.

"Impossible," exclaimed Barris, "they can't have left."

"They have, sir," said David in a sepulchral voice which I hardly recognized.

We all three looked at the old man curiously, waiting for his explanation of this disappointing but sensational report.

David looked at Howlett and Howlett examined the sky.

"I was going," began the old man, with his eyes fastened on Howlett, "I was going along by the spinney with the dogs when I heard a noise in the covert and I seen Howlett come walkin' very fast toward me. In fact," continued David, "I may say he was runnin'. Was you runnin', Howlett?"

Howlett said "Yes," with a decorous cough.

"I beg pardon," said David, "but I'd rather Howlett told the rest. He saw things which I did not."

"Go on, Howlett," commanded Pierpont, much interested.

Howlett coughed again behind his large red hand.

"What David says is true sir," he began; "I h'observed the dogs at a distance 'ow they was a workin' sir, and David stood a lightin' of 's pipe be'ind the spotted beech when I see a 'ead pop up in the covert 'oldin a stick like 'e was h'aimin' at the dogs sir"—

"A head holding a stick?" said Pierpont severely.

"The 'ead 'ad 'ands, sir," explained Howlett, "'ands that 'eld a painted stick,—like that, sir. 'Owlett, thinks I to meself, this 'ere's queer, so I jumps in an' runs, but the beggar 'e seen me an' w'en I comes alongside of David, 'e was gone. ''Ello 'Owlett,' sez David, 'what the 'ell'—I beg pardon, sir,—''ow did you come 'ere,' sez 'e very loud. 'Run!' sez I, 'the Chinaman is harryin' the dawgs!' 'For Gawd's sake wot Chinaman?' sez David, h'aimin' 'is gun at every bush. Then I thinks I see 'im an' we run an' run, the dawgs a boundin' close to heel sir, but we don't see no Chinaman."

"I'll tell the rest," said David, as Howlett coughed and stepped in a modest corner behind the dogs.

"Go on," said Barris in a strange voice.

"Well sir, when Howlett and I stopped chasin', we was on the cliff overlooking the south meadow. I noticed that there was hundreds of birds there, mostly yellow-legs and plover, and Howlett seen them too. Then before I could say a word to Howlett, something out in the lake gave a splash—a splash as if the whole cliff had fallen into the water. I was that scared that I jumped straight into the bush and Howlett he sat down quick, and all those snipe wheeled up—there was hundreds,—all a squeelin' with fright, and the wood-duck came bowlin' over the meadows as if the old Nick was behind."

David paused and glanced meditatively at the dogs.

"Go on," said Barris in the same strained voice.

"Nothing more sir. The snipe did not come back."

"But that splash in the lake?"

"I don't know what it was sir."

"A salmon? A salmon couldn't have frightened the duck and the snipe that way?"

"No—oh no, sir. If fifty salmon had jumped they couldn't have made that splash. Couldn't they, Howlett?"

"No 'ow," said Howlett.

"Roy," said Barris at length, "what David tells us settles the snipe shooting for to-day. I am going to take Pierpont up to the house. Howlett and David will follow with the dogs,—I have something to say to them. If you care to come, come along; if not, go and shoot a brace of grouse for dinner and be back by eight if you want to see what Pierpont and I discovered last night."

David whistled Gamin and Mioche to heel and followed Howlett and his hamper toward the house. I called Voyou to my side, picked up my gun and turned to Barris.

"I will be back by eight," I said; "you are expecting to catch one of the gold-makers, are you not?"

"Yes," said Barris listlessly.

Pierpont began to speak about the Chinaman but Barris motioned him to follow, and, nodding to me, took the path that Howlett and David had followed toward the house. When they disappeared I tucked my gun under my arm and turned sharply into the forest, Voyou trotting close to my heels.

In spite of myself the continued apparition of the Chinaman made me nervous. If he troubled me again I had fully decided to get the drop on him and find out what he was doing in the Cardinal Woods. If he could give no satisfactory account of himself I would march him in to Barris as a gold-making suspect,—I would march him in anyway, I thought, and rid the forest of his ugly face. I wondered what it was that David had heard in the lake. It must have been a big fish, a salmon, I thought; probably David's and Howlett's nerves were overwrought after their Celestial chase.

A whine from the dog broke the thread of my meditation and I raised my head. Then I stopped short in my tracks.

The lost glade lay straight before me.

Already the dog had bounded into it, across the velvet turf to the carved stone where a slim figure sat. I saw my dog lay his silky head lovingly against her silken kirtle; I saw her face bend above him, and I caught my breath and slowly entered the sun-lit glade.

Half timidly she held out one white hand.

"Now that you have come," she said, "I can show you more of my work. I told you that I could do other things besides these dragon-flies and moths carved here in stone. Why do you stare at me so? Are you ill?"

"Ysonde," I stammered.

"Yes," she said, with a faint color under her eyes.

"I—I never expected to see you again," I blurted out, "—you—I—I—thought I had dreamed—"

"Dreamed, of me? Perhaps you did, is that strange?"

"Strange? N—no—but—where did you go when—when we were leaning over the fountain together? I saw your face,—your face reflected beside mine and then—then suddenly I saw the blue sky and only a star twinkling."

"It was because you fell asleep," she said. "was it not?"

"I—asleep?"

"You slept—I thought you were very tired and I went back—"

"Back?—where?"

"Back to my home where I carve my beautiful images; see, here is one I brought to show you to-day."

I took the sculptured creature that she held toward me, a massive golden lizard with frail claw-spread wings of gold so thin that the sunlight burned through and fell on the ground in flaming gilded patches.

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed, "this is astounding! Where did you learn to do such work? Ysonde, such a thing is beyond price!"

"Oh, I hope so," she said earnestly, "I can't bear to sell my work, but my step-father takes it and sends it away. This is the second thing I have done and yesterday he said I must give it to him. I suppose he is poor."

"I don't see how he can be poor if he gives you gold to model in," I said, astonished.

"Gold!" she exclaimed, "gold! He has a room full of gold! He makes it."

I sat down on the turf at her feet completely unnerved.

"Why do you look at me so?" she asked, a little troubled.

"Where does your step-father live?" I said at last.

"Here."

"Here!"

"In the woods near the lake. You could never find our house."

"A house!"

"Of course. Did you think I lived in a tree? How silly. I live with my step-father in a beautiful house,—a small house, but very beautiful. He makes his gold there but the men who carry it away never come to the house, for they don't know where it is and if they did they could not get in. My step-father carries the gold in lumps to a canvas satchel. When the satchel is full he takes it out into the woods where the men live and I don't know what they do with it. I wish he could sell the gold and become rich for then I could go back to Yian where all the gardens are sweet and the river flows under the thousand bridges."

"Where is this city?" I asked faintly.

"Yian? I don't know. It is sweet with perfume and the sound of silver bells all day long. Yesterday I carried a blossom of dried lotus buds from Yian, in my breast, and all the woods were fragrant. Did you smell it?"

"Yes."

"I wondered, last night, whether you did. How beautiful your dog is; I love him. Yesterday I thought most about your dog but last night—"

"Last night," I repeated below my breath.

"I thought of you. Why do you wear the dragon-claw?"

I raised my hand impulsively to my forehead, covering the scar.

"What do you know of the dragon-claw?" I muttered.

"It is the symbol of Yue-Laou, and Yue-Laou rules the Kuen-Yuin, my step-father says. My step-father tells me everything that I know. We lived in Yian until I was sixteen years old. I am eighteen now; that is two years we have lived in the forest. Look!—see those scarlet birds! What are they? There are birds of the same color in Yian."

"Where is Yian, Ysonde?" I asked with deadly calmness.

"Yian? I don't know."

"But you have lived there?"

"Yes, a very long time."

"Is it across the ocean, Ysonde?"

"It is across seven oceans and the great river which is longer than from the earth to the moon."

"Who told you that?"

"Who? My step-father; he tells me everything."

"Will you tell me his name, Ysonde?"

"I don't know it, he is my step-father, that is all."

"And what is your name?"

"You know it, Ysonde."

"Yes, but what other name."

"That is all, Ysonde. Have you two names? Why do you look at me so impatiently?"

"Does your step-father make gold? Have you seen him make it?"

"Oh yes. He made it also in Yian and I loved to watch the sparks at night whirling like golden bees. Yian is lovely,—if it is all like our garden and the gardens around. I can see the thousand bridges from my garden and the white mountain beyond—"

"And the people—tell me of the people, Ysonde!" I urged gently.

"The people of Yian? I could see them in swarms like ants—oh! many, many millions crossing and recrossing the thousand bridges."

"But how did they look? Did they dress as I do?"

"I don't know. They were very far away, moving specks on the thousand bridges. For sixteen years I saw them every day from my garden but I never went out of my garden into the streets of Yian, for my step-father forbade me."

"You never saw a living creature near by in Yian?" I asked in despair.

"My birds, oh such tall, wise-looking birds, all over grey and rose color."

She leaned over the gleaming water and drew her polished hand across the surface.

"Why do you ask me these questions," she murmured; "are you displeased?"

"Tell me about your step-father," I insisted. "Does he look as I do? Does he dress, does he speak as I do? Is he American?"

"American? I don't know. He does not dress as you do and he does not look as you do. He is old, very, very old. He speaks sometimes as you do, sometimes as they do in Yian. I speak also in both manners."

"Then speak as they do in Yian," I urged impatiently, "speak as—why, Ysonde! why are you crying? Have I hurt you?—I did not intend,—I did not dream of your caring! There Ysonde, forgive me,—see, I beg you on my knees here at your feet."

I stopped, my eyes fastened on a small golden ball which hung from her waist by a golden chain. I saw it trembling against her thigh, I saw it change color, now crimson, now purple, now flaming scarlet. It was the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin.

She bent over me and laid her fingers gently on my arm.

"Why do you ask me such things?" she said, while the tears glistened on her lashes. "It hurts me here,—" she pressed her hand to her breast,—"it pains.—I don't know why. Ah, now your eyes are hard and cold again; you are looking at the golden globe which hangs from my waist. Do you wish to know also what that is?"

"Yes," I muttered, my eyes fixed on the infernal color flames which subsided as I spoke, leaving the ball a pale gilt again.

"It is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin," she said in a trembling voice; "why do you ask?"

"Is it yours?"

"Y—yes."

"Where did you get it?" I cried harshly.

"My—my step-fa—"

Then she pushed me away from her with all the strength of her slender wrists and covered her face.

If I slipped my arm about her and drew her to me,—if I kissed away the tears that fell slowly between her fingers,—if I told her how I loved her—how it cut me to the heart to see her unhappy,—after all that is my own business. When she smiled through her tears, the pure love and sweetness in her eyes lifted my soul higher than the high moon vaguely glimmering through the sun-lit blue above. My happiness was so sudden, so fierce and overwhelming that I only knelt there, her fingers clasped in mine, my eyes raised to the blue vault and the glimmering moon. Then something in the long grass beside me moved close to my knees and a damp acrid odor filled my nostrils.

"Ysonde!" I cried, but the touch of her hand was already gone and my two clenched fists were cold and damp with dew.

"Ysonde!" I called again, my tongue stiff with fright;—but I called as one awaking from a dream—a horrid dream, for my nostrils quivered with the damp acrid odor and I felt the crab-reptile clinging to my knee. Why had the night fallen so swiftly,—and where was I—where?—stiff, chilled, torn, and bleeding, lying flung like a corpse over my own threshold with Voyou licking my face and Barris stooping above me in the light of a lamp that flared and smoked in the night breeze like a torch. Faugh! the choking stench of the lamp aroused me and I cried out:

"Ysonde!"

"What the devil's the matter with him?" muttered Pierpont, lifting me in his arms like a child, "has he been stabbed, Barris?"

VII

In a few minutes I was able to stand and walk stiffly into my bedroom where Howlett had a hot bath ready and a hotter tumbler of Scotch. Pierpont sponged the blood from my throat where it had coagulated. The cut was slight, almost invisible, a mere puncture from a thorn. A shampoo cleared my mind, and a cold plunge and alcohol friction did the rest.

"Now," said Pierpont, "swallow your hot Scotch and lie down. Do you want a broiled woodcock? Good, I fancy you are coming about."

Barris and Pierpont watched me as I sat on the edge of the bed, solemnly chewing on the woodcock's wishbone and sipping my Bordeaux, very much at my ease.

Pierpont sighed his relief.

"So," he said pleasantly, "it was a mere case of ten dollars or ten days. I thought you had been stabbed—"

"I was not intoxicated," I replied, serenely picking up a bit of celery.

"Only jagged?" enquired Pierpont, full of sympathy.

"Nonsense," said Barris, "let him alone. Want some more celery, Roy?—it will make you sleep."

"I don't want to sleep," I answered; "when are you and Pierpont going to catch your gold-maker?"

Barris looked at his watch and closed it with a snap.

"In an hour; you don't propose to go with us?"

"But I do,—toss me a cup of coffee, Pierpont, will you,—that's just what I propose to do. Howlett, bring the new box of Panatellas,—the mild imported;—and leave the decanter. Now Barris, I'll be dressing, and you and Pierpont keep still and listen to what I have to say. Is that door shut tight?"

Barris locked it and sat down.

"Thanks," said I. "Barris, where is the city of Yian?"

An expression akin to terror flashed into Barris' eyes and I saw him stop breathing for a moment.

"There is no such city," he said at length, "have I been talking in my sleep?"

"It is a city," I continued, calmly, "where the river winds under the thousand bridges, where the gardens are sweet scented and the air is filled with the music of silver bells—"

"Stop!" gasped Barris, and rose trembling from his chair. He had grown ten years older.

"Roy," interposed Pierpont coolly, "what the deuce are you harrying Barris for?"

I looked at Barris and he looked at me. After a second or two he sat down again.

"Go on, Roy," he said.

"I must," I answered, "for now I am certain that I have not dreamed."

I told them everything; but, even as I told it, the whole thing seemed so vague, so unreal, that at times I stopped with the hot blood tingling in my ears, for it seemed impossible that sensible men, in the year of our Lord 1896, could seriously discuss such matters.

I feared Pierpont, but he did not even smile. As for Barris, he sat with his handsome head sunk on his breast, his unlighted pipe clasped tight in both hands.

When I had finished, Pierpont turned slowly and looked at Barris. Twice he moved his lips as if about to ask something and then remained mute.

"Yian is a city," said Barris, speaking dreamily; "was that why you wished to know, Pierpont?"

We nodded silently.

"Yian is a city," repeated Barris, "where the great river winds under the thousand bridges,—where the gardens are sweet scented, and the air is filled with the music of silver bells."

My lips formed the question, "Where is this city?"

"It lies," said Barris, almost querulously, "across the seven oceans and the river which is longer than from the earth to the moon."

"What do you mean?" said Pierpont.

"Ah," said Barris, rousing himself with an effort and raising his sunken eyes, "I am using the allegories of another land; let it pass. Have I not told you of the Kuen-Yuin? Yian is the centre of the Kuen-Yuin. It lies hidden in that gigantic shadow called China, vague and vast as the midnight Heavens,—a continent unknown, impenetrable."

"Impenetrable," repeated Pierpont below his breath.

"I have seen it," said Barris dreamily. "I have seen the dead plains of Black Cathay and I have crossed the mountains of Death, whose summits are above the atmosphere. I have seen the shadow of Xangi cast across Abaddon. Better to die a million miles from Yezd and Ater Quedah than to have seen the white water-lotus close in the shadow of Xangi! I have slept among the ruins of Xaindu where the winds never cease and the Wulwulleh is wailed by the dead."

"And Yian," I urged gently.

There was an unearthly look on his face as he turned slowly toward me.

"Yian,—I have lived there—and loved there. When the breath of my body shall cease, when the dragon's claw shall fade from my arm,"—

he tore up his sleeve, and we saw a white crescent shining above his elbow,—"when the light of my eyes has faded forever, then, even then I shall not forget the city of Yian. Why, it is my home,—mine! The river and the thousand bridges, the white peak beyond, the sweet-scented gardens, the lilies, the pleasant noise of the summer wind laden with bee music and the music of bells,—all these are mine. Do you think because the Kuen-Yuin feared the dragon's claw on my arm that my work with them is ended? Do you think that because Yue-Laou could give, that I acknowledge his right to take away? Is he Xangi in whose shadow the white water-lotus dares not raise its head? No! No!" he cried violently, "it was not from Yue-Laou, the sorcerer, the Maker of Moons, that my happiness came! It was real, it was not a shadow to vanish like a tinted bubble! Can a sorcerer create and give a man the woman he loves? Is Yue-Laou as great as Xangi then? Xangi is God. In His own time, in His infinite goodness and mercy He will bring me again to the woman I love. And I know she waits for me at God's feet."

In the strained silence that followed I could hear my heart's double beat and I saw Pierpont's face, blanched and pitiful. Barris shook himself and raised his head. The change in his ruddy face frightened me.

"Heed!" he said, with a terrible glance at me; "the print of the dragon's claw is on your forehead and Yue-Laou knows it. If you must love, then love like a man, for you will suffer like a soul in hell, in the end. What is her name again?"

"Ysonde," I answered simply.

VIII

At nine o'clock that night we caught one of the gold-makers. I do not know how Barris had laid his trap; all I saw of the affair can be told in a minute or two.

We were posted on the Cardinal road about a mile below the house, Pierpont and I with drawn revolvers on one side, under a butternut tree, Barris on the other, a Winchester across his knees.

I had just asked Pierpont the hour, and he was feeling for his watch when far up the road we heard the sound of a galloping horse, nearer, nearer, clattering, thundering past. Then Barris' rifle spat flame and the dark mass, horse and rider, crashed into the dust. Pierpont had the half stunned horseman by the collar in a second,—the horse was stone dead,—and, as we lighted a pine knot to examine the fellow, Barris' two riders galloped up and drew bridle beside us.

"Hm!" said Barris with a scowl, "it's the 'Shiner,' or I'm a moonshiner."

We crowded curiously around to see the "Shiner." He was red-headed, fat and filthy, and his little red eyes burned in his head like the eyes of an angry pig.

Barris went through his pockets methodically while Pierpont held him and I held the torch. The Shiner was a gold mine; pockets, shirt, bootlegs, hat, even his dirty fists, clutched tight and bleeding, were bursting with lumps of soft yellow gold. Barris dropped this "moonshine gold," as we had come to call it, into the pockets of his shooting-coat, and withdrew to question the prisoner. He came back again in a few minutes and motioned his mounted men to take the Shiner in charge. We watched them, rifle on thigh, walking their horses slowly away into the darkness, the Shiner, tightly bound, shuffling sullenly between them.

"Who is the Shiner?" asked Pierpont, slipping the revolver into his pocket again.

"A moonshiner, counterfeiter, forger, and highwayman," said Barris, "and probably a murderer. Drummond will be glad to see him, and I think it likely he will be persuaded to confess to him what he refuses to confess to me."

"Wouldn't he talk?" I asked.

"Not a syllable. Pierpont, there is nothing more for you to do."

"For me to do? Are you not coming back with us, Barris?"

"No," said Barris.

We walked along the dark road in silence for a while, I wondering what Barris intended to do, but he said nothing more until we reached our own verandah. Here he held out his hand, first to Pierpont, then to me, saying good-bye as though he were going on a long journey.

"How soon will you be back?" I called out to him as he turned away toward the gate. He came across the lawn again and again took our hands with a quiet affection that I had never imagined him capable of.

"I am going," he said, "to put an end to his gold-making to-night. I know that you fellows have never suspected what I was about on my little solitary evening strolls after dinner. I will tell you. Already I have unobtrusively killed four of these gold-makers,—my men put them under ground just below the new wash-out at the four mile stone. There are three left alive,—the Shiner whom we have, another criminal named 'Yellow,' or 'Yaller' in the vernacular, and the third—"

"The third," repeated Pierpont, excitedly.

"The third I have never yet seen. But I know who and what he is,—I know; and if he is of human flesh and blood, his blood will flow to-night."

As he spoke a slight noise across the turf attracted my attention. A mounted man was advancing silently in the starlight over the spongy meadowland. When he came nearer Barris struck a match, and we saw that he bore a corpse across his saddle bow.

"Yaller, Colonel Barris," said the man, touching his slouched hat in salute.

This grim introduction to the corpse made me shudder, and, after a moment's examination of the stiff, wide-eyed dead man, I drew back.

"Identified," said Barris, "take him to the four mile post and carry his effects to Washington,—under seal, mind, Johnstone."

Away cantered the rider with his ghastly burden, and Barris took our hands once more for the last time. Then he went away, gaily, with a jest on his lips, and Pierpont and I turned back into the house.

For an hour we sat moodily smoking in the hall before the fire, saying little until Pierpont burst out with: "I wish Barris had taken one of us with him to-night!"

The same thought had been running in my mind, but I said: "Barris knows what he's about."

This observation neither comforted us nor opened the lane to further conversation, and after a few minutes Pierpont said good night and called for Howlett and hot water. When he had been warmly tucked away by Howlett, I turned out all but one lamp, sent the dogs away with David and dismissed Howlett for the night.

I was not inclined to retire for I knew I could not sleep. There was a book lying open on the table beside the fire and I opened it and read a page or two, but my mind was fixed on other things.

The window shades were raised and I looked out at the star-set firmament. There was no moon that night but the sky was dusted all over with sparkling stars and a pale radiance, brighter even than moonlight, fell over meadow and wood. Far away in the forest I heard the voice of the wind, a soft warm wind that whispered a name, Ysonde.

"Listen," sighed the voice of the wind, and "listen" echoed the swaying trees with every little leaf a-quiver. I listened.

Where the long grasses trembled with the cricket's cadence I heard her name, Ysonde; I heard it in the rustling woodbine where grey moths hovered; I heard it in the drip, drip, drip of the dew from the porch. The silent meadow brook whispered her name, the rippling woodland streams repeated it, Ysonde, Ysonde, until all earth and sky were filled with the soft thrill, Ysonde, Ysonde, Ysonde.

A night-thrush sang in a thicket by the porch and I stole to the verandah to listen. After a while it began again, a little further on. I ventured out into the road. Again I heard it far away in the forest and I followed it, for I knew it was singing of Ysonde.

When I came to the path that leaves the main road and enters the Sweet-Fern Covert below the spinney, I hesitated; but the beauty of the night lured me on and the night-thrushes called me from every thicket. In the starry radiance, shrubs, grasses, field flowers, stood out distinctly, for there was no moon to cast shadows. Meadow and brook, grove and stream, were illuminated by the pale glow. Like great lamps lighted the planets hung from the high domed sky and through their mysterious rays the fixed stars, calm, serene, stared from the heavens like eyes.

I waded on waist deep through fields of dewy golden-rod, through late clover and wild-oat wastes, through crimson fruited sweetbrier, blueberry, and wild plum, until the low whisper of the Wier Brook warned me that the path had ended.

But I would not stop, for the night air was heavy with the perfume of water-lilies and far away, across the low wooded cliffs and the wet meadow-land beyond, there was a distant gleam of silver, and I heard the murmur of sleepy waterfowl. I would go to the lake. The way was clear except for the dense young growth and the snares of the moose-bush.

The night-thrushes had ceased but I did not want for the company of living creatures. Slender, quick darting forms crossed my path at intervals, sleek mink, that fled like shadows at my step, wiry weasels and fat musk-rats, hurrying onward to some tryst or killing.

I never had seen so many little woodland creatures on the move at night. I began to wonder where they all were going so fast, why they all hurried on in the same direction. Now I passed a hare hopping through the brushwood, now a rabbit scurrying by, flag hoisted. As I entered the beech second-growth two foxes glided by me; a little further on a doe crashed out of the underbrush, and close behind her stole a lynx, eyes shining like coals.

He neither paid attention to the doe nor to me, but loped away toward the north.

The lynx was in flight.

"From what?" I asked myself, wondering. There was no forest fire, no cyclone, no flood.

If Barris had passed that way could he have stirred up this sudden exodus? Impossible; even a regiment in the forest could scarcely have put to rout these frightened creatures.

"What on earth," thought I, turning to watch the headlong flight of a fisher-cat, "what on earth has started the beasts out at this time of night?"

I looked up into the sky. The placid glow of the fixed stars comforted me and I stepped on through the narrow spruce belt that leads down to the borders of the Lake of the Stars.

Wild cranberry and moose-bush entwined my feet, dewy branches spattered me with moisture, and the thick spruce needles scraped my face as I threaded my way over mossy logs and deep spongy tussocks down to the level gravel of the lake shore.

Although there was no wind the little waves were hurrying in from the lake and I heard them splashing among the pebbles. In the pale star glow thousands of water-lilies lifted their half-closed chalices toward the sky.

I threw myself full length upon the shore, and, chin on hand, looked out across the lake.

Splash, splash, came the waves along the shore, higher, nearer, until a film of water, thin and glittering as a knife blade, crept up to my elbows. I could not understand it; the lake was rising, but there had been no rain. All along the shore the water was running up; I heard the waves among the sedge grass; the weeds at my side were awash in the ripples. The lilies rocked on the tiny waves, every wet pad rising on the swells, sinking, rising again until the whole lake was glimmering with undulating blossoms. How sweet and deep was the fragrance from the lilies. And now the water was ebbing, slowly, and the waves receded, shrinking from the shore rim until the white pebbles appeared again, shining like froth on a brimming glass.

No animal swimming out in the darkness along the shore, no heavy salmon surging, could have set the whole shore aflood as though the wash from a great boat were rolling in. Could it have been the overflow, through the Weir Brook, of some cloud-burst far back in the forest? This was the only way I could account for it, and yet when I had crossed the Wier Brook I had not noticed that it was swollen.

And as I lay there thinking, a faint breeze sprang up and I saw the surface of the lake whiten with lifted lily pads.

All around me the alders were sighing; I heard the forest behind me stir; the crossed branches rubbing softly, bark against bark. Something—it may have been an owl—sailed out of the night, dipped, soared, and was again engulfed, and far across the water I heard its faint cry, Ysonde.

Then first, for my heart was full, I cast myself down upon my face, calling on her name. My eyes were wet when I raised my head,—for the spray from the shore was drifting in again,—and my heart beat heavily; "No more, no more." But my heart lied, for even as I raised my face to the calm stars, I saw her standing still, close beside me; and very gently I spoke her name, Ysonde. She held out both hands.

"I was lonely," she said, "and I went to the glade, but the forest is full of frightened creatures and they frightened me. Has anything happened in the woods? The deer are running toward the heights."

Her hand still lay in mine as we moved along the shore, and the lapping of the water on rock and shallow was no lower than our voices.

"Why did you leave me without a word, there at the fountain in the glade?" she said.

"I leave you!—"

"Indeed you did, running swiftly with your dog, plunging through thickets and brush,—oh—you frightened me."

"Did I leave you so?"

"Yes—after—"

"After?"

"You had kissed me—"

Then we leaned down together and looked into the black water set with stars, just as we had bent together over the fountain in the glade.

"Do you remember?" I asked.

"Yes. See, the water is inlaid with silver stars,—everywhere white lilies floating and the stars below, deep, deep down."

"What is the flower you hold in your hand?"

"White water-lotus."

"Tell me about Yue-Laou, Dzil-Nbu of the Kuen-Yuin," I whispered, lifting her head so I could see her eyes.

"Would it please you to hear?"

"Yes, Ysonde."

"All that I know is yours, now, as I am yours, all that I am. Bend closer. Is it of Yue-Laou you would know? Yue-Laou is Dzil-Nbu of the Kuen-Yuin. He lived in the Moon. He is old—very, very old, and once, before he came to rule the Kuen-Yuin, he was the old man who unites with a silken cord all predestined couples, after which nothing can prevent their union. But all that is changed since he came to rule the Kuen-Yuin. Now he has perverted the Xin,—the good genii of China,—and has fashioned from their warped bodies a monster which he calls the Xin. This monster is horrible, for it not only lives in its own body, but it has thousands of loathsome satellites,—living creatures without mouths, blind, that move when the Xin moves, like a mandarin and his escort. They are part of the Xin although they are not attached. Yet if one of these satellites is injured the Xin writhes with agony. It is fearful—this huge living bulk and these creatures spread out like severed fingers that wriggle around a hideous hand."

"Who told you this?"

"My step-father."

"Do you believe it?"

"Yes. I have seen one of the Xin's creatures."

"Where, Ysonde?"

"Here in the woods."

"Then you believe there is a Xin here?"

"There must be,—perhaps in the lake—"

"Oh, Xins inhabit lakes?"

"Yes, and the seven seas. I am not afraid here."

"Why?"

"Because I wear the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin."

"Then I am not safe," I smiled.

"Yes you are, for I hold you in my arms. Shall I tell you more about the Xin? When the Xin is about to do to death a man, the Yeth-hounds gallop through the night—"

"What are the Yeth-hounds, Ysonde?"

"The Yeth-hounds are dogs without heads. They are the spirits of murdered children, which pass through the woods at night, making a wailing noise."

"Do you believe this?"

"Yes, for I have worn the yellow lotus—"

"The yellow lotus—"

"Yellow is the symbol of faith—"

"Where?"

"In Yian," she said faintly.

After a while I said, "Ysonde, you know there is a God?"

"God and Xangi are one."

"Have you ever heard of Christ?"

"No," she answered softly.

The wind began again among the tree tops. I felt her hands closing in mine.

"Ysonde," I asked again, "do you believe in sorcerers?"

"Yes, the Kuen-Yuin are sorcerers; Yue-Laou is a sorcerer."

"Have you seen sorcery?"

"Yes, the reptile satellite of the Xin—"

"Anything else?"

"My charm,—the golden ball, the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin. Have you seen it change,—have you seen the reptiles writhe—?"

"Yes," I said shortly, and then remained silent, for a sudden shiver of apprehension had seized me. Barris also had spoken gravely, ominously of the sorcerers, the Kuen-Yuin, and I had seen with my own eyes the graven reptiles turning and twisting on the glowing globe.

"Still," said I aloud, "God lives and sorcery is but a name."

"Ah," murmured Ysonde, drawing closer to me, "they say, in Yian, the Kuen-Yuin live; God is but a name."

"They lie," I whispered fiercely.

"Be careful," she pleaded, "they may hear you. Remember that you have the mark of the dragon's claw on your brow."

"What of it?" I asked, thinking also of the white mark on Barris' arm.

"Ah don't you know that those who are marked with the dragon's claw are followed by Yue-Laou, for good or for evil,—and the evil means death if you offend him?"

"Do you believe that!" I asked impatiently.

"I know it," she sighed.

"Who told you all this? Your step-father? What in Heaven's name is he then,—a Chinaman!"

"I don't know; he is not like you."

"Have—have you told him anything about me?"

"He knows about you—no, I have told him nothing,—ah what is this—see—it is a cord, a cord of silk about your neck—and about mine!"

"Where did that come from?" I asked astonished.

"It must be—it must be Yue-Laou who binds me to you,—it is as my step-father said—he said Yue-Laou would bind us—"

"Nonsense," I said almost roughly, and seized the silken cord, but to my amazement it melted in my hand like smoke.

"What is all this damnable jugglery!" I whispered angrily, but my anger vanished as the words were spoken, and a convulsive shudder shook me to the feet. Standing on the shore of the lake, a stone's throw away, was a figure, twisted and bent,—a little old man, blowing sparks from a live coal which he held in his naked hand. The coal glowed with increasing radiance, lighting up the skull-like face above it, and threw a red glow over the sands at his feet. But the face!—the ghastly Chinese face on which the light flickered,—and the snaky slitted eyes, sparkling as the coal glowed hotter. Coal! It was not a coal but a golden globe staining the night with crimson flames,—it was the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin.

"See! See!" gasped Ysonde, trembling violently, "see the moon rising from between his fingers! Oh I thought it was my step-father and it is Yue-Laou the Maker of Moons—no! no! it is my step-father—ah God! they are the same!"

Frozen with terror I stumbled to my knees, groping for my revolver which bulged in my coat pocket; but something held me—something which bound me like a web in a thousand strong silky meshes. I struggled and turned but the web grew tighter; it was over us—all around us, drawing, pressing us into each other's arms until we lay side by side, bound hand and body and foot, palpitating, panting like a pair of netted pigeons.

And the creature on the shore below! What was my horror to see a moon, huge, silvery, rise like a bubble from between his fingers, mount higher, higher into the still air and hang aloft in the midnight sky, while another moon rose from his fingers, and another and yet another until the vast span of Heaven was set with moons and the earth sparkled like a diamond in the white glare.

A great wind began to blow from the east and it bore to our ears a long mournful howl,—a cry so unearthly that for a moment our hearts stopped.

"The Yeth-hounds!" sobbed Ysonde, "do you hear!—they are passing through the forest! The Xin is near!"

Then all around us in the dry sedge grasses came a rustle as if some small animals were creeping, and a damp acrid odor filled the air. I knew the smell, I saw the spidery crablike creatures swarm out around me and drag their soft yellow hairy bodies across the shrinking grasses. They passed, hundreds of them, poisoning the air, tumbling, writhing, crawling with their blind mouthless heads raised. Birds, half asleep and confused by the darkness, fluttered away before them in helpless fright, rabbits sprang from their forms, weasels glided away like flying shadows. What remained of the forest creatures rose and fled from the loathsome invasion; I heard the squeak of a terrified hare, the snort of stampeding deer, and the lumbering gallop of a bear; and all the time I was choking, half suffocated by the poisoned air.

Then, as I struggled to free myself from the silken snare about me, I cast a glance of deadly fear at the sorcerer below, and at the same moment I saw him turn in his tracks.

"Halt!" cried a voice from the bushes.

"Barris!" I shouted, half leaping up in my agony.

I saw the sorcerer spring forward, I heard the bang! bang! bang! of a revolver, and, as the sorcerer fell on the water's edge, I saw Barris jump out into the white glare and fire again, once, twice, three times, into the writhing figure at his feet.

Then an awful thing occurred. Up out of the black lake reared a shadow, a nameless shapeless mass, headless, sightless, gigantic, gaping from end to end.

A great wave struck Barris and he fell, another washed him up on the pebbles, another whirled him back into the water and then,—and then the thing fell over him,—and I fainted.

* * *

This, then, is all that I know concerning Yue-Laou and the Xin. I do not fear the ridicule of scientists or of the press for I have told the truth. Barris is gone and the thing that killed him is alive to-day in the Lake of the Stars while the spider-like satellites roam through the Cardinal Woods. The game has fled, the forests around the lake are empty of any living creatures save the reptiles that creep when the Xin moves in the depths of the lake.

General Drummond knows what he has lost in Barris, and we, Pierpont and I, know what we have lost also. His will we found in the drawer, the key of which he had handed me. It was wrapped in a bit of paper on which was written:

> "Yue-Laou the sorcerer is here in the Cardinal Woods. I must kill him or he will kill me. He made and gave to me the woman I loved,—he made her,—I saw him,—he made her out of a white water-lotus bud. When our child was born, he came again before me and demanded from me the woman I loved. Then, when I refused, he went away, and that night my wife and child vanished from my side, and I found upon her pillow a white lotus bud. Roy, the woman of your dream, Ysonde, may be my child. God help you if you love her for Yue-Laou will give,—and take away, as though he were Xangi, which is God. I will kill Yue-Laou before I leave this forest,—or he will kill me.
>
> "FRANKLYN BARRIS."

Now the world knows what Barris thought of the Kuen-Yuin and of Yue-Laou. I see that the newspapers are just becoming excited over the glimpses that Li-Hung-Chang has afforded them of Black Cathay and the demons of the Kuen-Yuin. The Kuen-Yuin are on the move.

Pierpont and I have dismantled the shooting box in the Cardinal Woods. We hold ourselves ready at a moment's notice to join and lead the first Government party to drag the Lake of Stars and cleanse the forest of the crab reptiles. But it will be necessary that a large force assembles, and a well-armed force, for we never have found the body of Yue-Laou, and, living or dead, I fear him. Is he living?

Pierpont, who found Ysonde and myself lying unconscious on the lake shore, the morning after, saw no trace of corpse or blood on the sands. He may have fallen into the lake, but I fear and Ysonde fears that he is alive. We never were able to find either her dwelling place or the glade and the fountain again. The only thing that remains to her of her former life is the gold serpent in the Metropolitan Museum and her golden globe, the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin; but the latter no longer changes color.

David and the dogs are waiting for me in the court yard as I write. Pierpont is in the gun room loading shells, and Howlett brings him mug after mug of my ale from the wood. Ysonde bends over my desk,—I feel her hand on my arm, and she is saying, "Don't you think you have done enough to-day, dear? How can you write such silly nonsense without a shadow of truth or foundation?" ❋

A Pleasant Evening

Et pis, doucett'ment on s'endort,
On fait sa carne, on fait sa sorgue,
On ronfle, et, comme un tuyau d'orgue,
L'tuyau s'met à ronfler pus fort. . . .
ARISTIDE BRUANT

I

As I stepped upon the platform of a Broadway cable-car at Forty-second Street, somebody said: "Hello, Hilton, Jamison's looking for you."

"Hello, Curtis," I replied, "what does Jamison want?"

"He wants to know what you've been doing all the week," said Curtis, hanging desperately to the railing as the car lurched forward; "he says you seem to think that the *Manhattan Illustrated Weekly* was created for the sole purpose of providing salary and vacations for you."

"The shifty old tom-cat!" I said, indignantly, "he knows well enough where I've been. Vacation! Does he think the State Camp in June is a snap?"

"Oh," said Curtis, "you've been to Peekskill?"

"I should say so," I replied, my wrath rising as I thought of my assignment.

"Hot?" inquired Curtis, dreamily.

"One hundred and three in the shade," I answered. "Jamison wanted three full pages and three half pages, all for process work, and a lot of line drawings into the bargain. I could have faked them—I wish I had. I was fool enough to hustle and break my neck to get some honest drawings, and that's the thanks I get!"

"Did you have a camera?"

"No. I will next time—I'll waste no more conscientious work on Jamison," I said sulkily.

"It doesn't pay," said Curtis. "When I have military work assigned me, I don't do the dashing sketch-artist act, you bet; I go to my studio, light my pipe, pull out a lot of old *Illustrated London News*, select several suitable battle scenes by Caton Woodville—and use 'em too."

The car shot around the neck-breaking curve at Fourteenth Street.

"Yes," continued Curtis, as the car stopped in front of the Morton House for a moment, then plunged forward again amid a furious clanging of gongs, "it doesn't pay to do decent work for the fat-headed men who run the *Manhattan Illustrated*. They don't appreciate it."

"I think the public does," I said, "but I'm sure Jamison doesn't. It would serve him right if I did what most of you fellows do—take a lot of Caton Woodville's and Thulstrup's drawings, change the uniforms, 'chic' a figure or two, and turn in a drawing labelled 'from life.' I'm sick of this sort of thing anyway. Almost every day this week I've been chasing myself over that tropical camp, or galloping in the wake of those batteries. I've got a full page of the 'camp by moonlight,' full pages of 'artillery drill' and 'light battery in action,' and a dozen smaller drawings that cost me more groans and perspiration than Jamison ever knew in all his lymphatic life!"

"Jamison's got wheels," said Curtis,—"more wheels than there are bicycles in Harlem. He wants you to do a full page by Saturday."

"A what?" I exclaimed, aghast.

"Yes he does—he was going to send Jim Crawford, but Jim expects to go to California for the winter fair, and you've got to do it."

"What is it?" I demanded savagely.

"The animals in Central Park," chuckled Curtis.

I was furious. The animals! Indeed! I'd show Jamison that I was entitled to some consideration! This was Thursday; that gave me a day and a half to finish a full-page drawing for the paper, and, after my work at the State Camp I felt that I was entitled to a little rest. Anyway I objected to the subject. I intended to tell Jamison so—I intended to tell him firmly. However, many of the things that we often intended to tell Jamison were never told. He was a peculiar man, fat-faced, thin-lipped, gentle-voiced, mild-mannered, and soft in his movements as a pussy-cat. Just why our firmness should give way when we were actually in his presence, I have never quite been able to determine. He said very little—so did we, although we often entered his presence with other intentions.

The truth was that the *Manhattan Illustrated Weekly* was the best paying, best illustrated paper in America, and we young fellows were not anxious to be cast adrift. Jamison's knowledge of art was probably as extensive as the knowledge of any "Art editor" in the city. Of course that was saying nothing, but the fact merited careful consideration on our part, and we gave it much consideration.

This time, however, I decided to let Jamison know that drawings are not produced by the yard, and that I was neither a floor-walker nor a hand-me-down. I would stand up for my rights; I'd tell old Jamison a few things to set the wheels under his silk hat spinning, and if he attempted any of his pussy-cat ways on me, I'd give him a few plain facts that would curl what hair he had left.

Glowing with a splendid indignation I jumped off the car at the City Hall, followed by Curtis, and a few minutes later entered the office of the *Manhattan Illustrated News*.

"Mr. Jamison would like to see you, sir," said one of the compositors as I passed into the long hallway. I threw my drawings on the table and passed a handkerchief over my forehead.

"Mr. Jamison would like to see you, sir," said a small freckle-faced boy with a smudge of ink on his nose.

"I know it," I said, and started to remove my gloves.

"Mr. Jamison would like to see you, sir," said a lank messenger who was carrying a bundle of proofs to the floor below.

"The deuce take Jamison," I said to myself. I started toward the dark passage that leads to the abode of Jamison, running over in my mind the neat and sarcastic speech which I had been composing during the last ten minutes.

Jamison looked up and nodded softly as I entered the room. I forgot my speech.

"Mr. Hilton," he said, "we want a full page of the Zoo before it is removed to Bronx Park. Saturday afternoon at three o'clock the drawing must be in the engraver's hands. Did you have a pleasant week in camp?"

"It was hot," I muttered, furious to find that I could not remember my little speech.

"The weather," said Jamison, with soft courtesy, "is oppressive everywhere. Are your drawings in, Mr. Hilton?"

"Yes. It was infernally hot and I worked like a nigger—"

"I suppose you were quite overcome. Is that why you took a two days' trip to the Catskills? I trust the mountain air restored you—but—was it prudent to go to Cranston's for the cotillion Tuesday? Dancing in such uncomfortable weather is really unwise. Good-morning, Mr. Hilton, remember the engraver should have your drawings on Saturday by three."

I walked out, half hypnotized, half enraged. Curtis grinned at me as I passed—I could have boxed his ears.

"Why the mischief should I lose my tongue whenever that old tom-cat purrs!" I asked myself as I entered the elevator and was shot down to the first floor. "I'll not put up with this sort of thing much longer—how in the name of all that's foxy did he know that I went to the mountains? I suppose he thinks I'm lazy because I don't wish to be boiled to death. How did he know about the dance at Cranston's? Old cat!"

The roar and turmoil of machinery and busy men filled my ears as I crossed the avenue and turned into the City Hall Park.

From the staff on the tower the flag drooped in the warm sunshine with scarcely a breeze to lift its crimson bars. Overhead stretched a splendid cloudless sky, deep, deep blue, thrilling, scintillating in the gemmed rays of the sun.

Pigeons wheeled and circled about the roof of the grey Post Office or dropped out of the blue above to flutter around the fountain in the square.

On the steps of the City Hall the unlovely politician lounged, exploring his heavy under jaw with wooden toothpick, twisting his drooping black moustache, or distributing tobacco juice over marble steps and close-clipped grass.

My eyes wandered from these human vermin to the calm scornful face of Nathan Hale, on his pedestal, and then to the grey-coated Park policeman whose occupation was to keep little children from the cool grass.

A young man with thin hands and blue circles under his eyes was slumbering on a bench by the fountain, and the policeman walked over to him and struck him on the soles of his shoes with a short club.

The young man rose mechanically, stared about, dazed by the sun, shivered, and limped away. I saw him sit down on the steps of the white marble building, and I went over and spoke to him. He neither looked at me, nor did he notice the coin I offered.

"You're sick," I said, "you had better go to the hospital."

"Where?" he asked vacantly—"I've been, but they wouldn't receive me."

He stooped and tied the bit of string that held what remained of his shoe to his foot.

"You are French," I said.

"Yes."

"Have you no friends? Have you been to the French Consul?"

"The Consul!" he replied; "no, I haven't been to the French Consul."

After a moment I said, "You speak like a gentleman."

He rose to his feet and stood very straight, looking me, for the first time, directly in the eyes.

"Who are you?" I asked abruptly.

"An outcast," he said, without emotion, and limped off thrusting his hands into his ragged pockets.

"Huh!" said the Park policeman who had come up behind me in time to hear my question and the vagabond's answer; "don't you know who that hobo is?—An' you a newspaper man!"

"Who is he, Cusick?" I demanded, watching the thin shabby figure moving across Broadway toward the river.

"On the level you don't know, Mr. Hilton?" repeated Cusick, suspiciously.

"No, I don't; I never before laid eyes on him."

"Why," said the sparrow policeman, "that's 'Soger Charlie';—you remember—that French officer what sold secrets to the Dutch Emperor."

"And was to have been shot? I remember now, four years ago—and he escaped—you mean to say that is the man?"

"Everybody knows it," sniffed Cusick, "I'd a-thought you newspaper gents would have knowed it first."

"What was his name?" I asked after a moment's thought.

"Soger Charlie—"

"I mean his name at home."

"Oh, some French dago name. No Frenchman will speak to him here; sometimes they curse him and kick him. I guess he's dyin' by inches."

I remembered the case now. Two young French cavalry officers were arrested, charged with selling plans of fortifications and other military secrets to the Germans. On the eve of their conviction, one of them, Heaven only knows how, escaped and turned up in New York. The other was duly shot. The affair had made some noise, because both young men were of good families. It was a painful episode, and I had hastened to forget it. Now that it was recalled to my mind, I remembered the newspaper accounts of the case, but I had forgotten the names of the miserable young men.

"Sold his country," observed Cusick, watching a group of children out of the corner of his eyes—"you can't trust no Frenchman nor dagoes nor Dutchmen either. I guess Yankees are about the only white men."

I looked at the noble face of Nathan Hale and nodded.

"Nothin' sneaky about us, eh, Mr. Hilton?"

I thought of Benedict Arnold and looked at my boots.

Then the policeman said, "Well, solong, Mr. Hilton," and went away to frighten a pasty-faced little girl who had climbed upon the railing and was leaning down to sniff the fragrant grass.

"Cheese it, de cop!" cried her shrill-voiced friends, and the whole bevy of small ragamuffins scuttled away across the square.

With a feeling of depression I turned and walked toward Broadway, where the long yellow cable-cars swept up and down, and the din of gongs and the deafening rumble of heavy trucks echoed from the marble walls of the Court House to the granite mass of the Post Office.

Throngs of hurrying busy people passed up town and down town, slim sober-faced clerks, trim cold-eyed brokers, here and there a red-necked politician linking arms with some favourite heeler, here and there a City Hall lawyer, sallow-faced and saturnine. Sometimes a fireman, in his severe blue uniform, passed through the crowd, sometimes a blue-coated policeman, mopping his clipped hair, holding his helmet in his white-gloved hand. There were women too, pale-faced shop girls with pretty eyes, tall blonde girls who might be typewriters and might not, and many, many older women whose business in that part of the city no human being could venture to guess, but who hurried up town and down town, all occupied with *something* that gave to the whole restless throng a common likeness—the expression of one who hastens toward a hopeless goal.

I knew some of those who passed me. There was little Jocelyn of the *Mail and Express;* there was Hood, who had more money than he wanted and was going to have less than he wanted when he left Wall Street; there was Colonel Tidmouse of the 45th Infantry, N.G.S.N.Y., probably coming from the office of the *Army and Navy Journal,* and there was Dick Harding who wrote the best stories of New York life that have been printed. People said his hat no longer fitted,—especially people who also wrote stories of New York life and whose hats threatened to fit as long as they lived.

I looked at the statue of Nathan Hale, then at the human stream that flowed around his pedestal.

"Quand même," I muttered and walked out into Broadway, signalling to the gripman of an uptown cable-car.

II

I passed into the Park by the Fifth Avenue and 59th Street gate; I could never bring myself to enter it through the gate that is guarded by the hideous pigmy statue of Thorwaldsen.

The afternoon sun poured into the windows of the New Netherlands Hotel, setting every orange-curtained pane a-glitter, and tipping the wings of the bronze dragons with flame.

Gorgeous masses of flowers blazed in the sunshine from the grey terraces of the Savoy, from the high grilled court of the Vanderbilt palace, and from the balconies of the Plaza opposite.

The white marble façade of the Metropolitan Club was a grateful relief in the universal glare, and I kept my eyes on it until I had crossed the dusty street and entered the shade of the trees.

Before I came to the Zoo I smelled it. Next week it was to be removed to the fresh cool woods and meadows in Bronx Park, far from the stifling air of the city, far from the infernal noise of the Fifth Avenue omnibuses.

A noble stag stared at me from his enclosure among the trees as I passed down the winding asphalt walk. "Never mind, old fellow," said I, "you will be splashing about in the Bronx River next week and cropping maple shoots to your heart's content."

On I went, past herds of staring deer, past great lumbering elk, and moose, and long-faced African antelopes, until I came to the dens of the great carnivora.

The tigers sprawled in the sunshine, blinking and licking their paws; the lions slept in the shade or squatted on their haunches, yawning gravely. A slim panther travelled to and fro behind her barred cage, pausing at times to peer wistfully out into the free sunny world. My heart ached for caged wild things, and I walked on, glancing up now and then to encounter the blank stare of a tiger or the mean shifty eyes of some ill-smelling hyena.

Across the meadow I could see the elephants swaying and swinging their great heads, the sober bison solemnly slobbering over their cuds, the sarcastic countenances of camels, the wicked little zebras, and a lot more animals of the camel and llama tribe, all resembling each other, all equally ridiculous, stupid, deadly uninteresting.

Somewhere behind the old arsenal an eagle was screaming, probably a Yankee eagle; I heard the "tchug! tchug!" of a blowing hippopotamus, the squeal of a falcon, and the snarling yap! of quarrelling wolves.

"A pleasant place for a hot day!" I pondered bitterly, and I thought some things about Jamison that I shall not insert in this volume. But I lighted a cigarette to deaden the aroma from the hyenas, unclasped my sketching block, sharpened my pencil, and fell to work on a family group of hippopotami.

They may have taken me for a photographer, for they all wore smiles as if "welcoming a friend," and my sketch block presented a series of wide open jaws, behind which shapeless bulky bodies vanished in alarming perspective.

The alligators were easy; they looked to me as though they had not moved since the founding of the Zoo, but I had a bad time with the big bison, who persistently turned his tail to me, looking stolidly around his flank to see how I stood it. So I pretended to be absorbed in the antics of two bear cubs, and the dreary old bison fell into the trap, for I made some good sketches of him and laughed in his face as I closed the book.

There was a bench by the abode of the eagles, and I sat down on it to draw the vultures and condors, motionless as mummies among the piled rocks. Gradually I enlarged the sketch, bringing in the gravel plaza, the steps leading up to Fifth Avenue, the sleepy park policeman in front of the arsenal—and a slim, white-browed girl, dressed in shabby black, who stood silently in the shade of the willow trees.

After a while I found that the sketch, instead of being a study of the eagles, was in reality a composition in which the girl in black occupied the principal point of interest. Unwittingly I had subordinated everything else to her, the brooding vultures, the trees and walks, and the half indicated groups of sun-warmed loungers.

She stood very still, her pallid face bent, her thin white hands loosely clasped before her. "Rather dejected reverie," I thought, "probably she's out of work." Then I caught a glimpse of a sparkling diamond ring on the slender third finger of her left hand.

"She'll not starve with such a stone as that about her," I said to myself, looking curiously at her dark eyes and sensitive mouth. They were both beautiful, eyes and mouth—beautiful, but touched with pain.

After a while I rose and walked back to make a sketch or two of the lions and tigers. I avoided the monkeys—I can't stand them, and they never seem funny to me, poor dwarfish, degraded caricatures of all that is ignoble in ourselves.

"I've enough now," I thought; "I'll go home and manufacture a full page that will probably please Jamison." So I strapped the elastic band around my sketching block, replaced pencil and rubber in my waistcoat pocket, and strolled off toward the Mall to smoke a cigarette in the evening glow before going back to my studio to work until midnight, up to the chin in charcoal grey and Chinese white.

Across the long meadow I could see the roofs of the city faintly looming above the trees. A mist of amethyst, ever deepening, hung low on the horizon, and through it, steeple and dome, roof and tower, and the tall chimneys where thin fillets of smoke curled idly, were transformed into pinnacles of beryl and flaming minarets, swimming in filmy haze. Slowly the enchantment deepened; all that was ugly and shabby and mean had fallen away from the distant city, and now it towered into the evening sky, splendid, gilded, magnificent, purified in the fierce furnace of the setting sun.

The red disk was half hidden now; the tracery of trees, feathery willow and budding birch, darkened against the glow; the fiery rays shot far across the meadow, gilding the dead leaves, staining with soft crimson the dark moist tree trunks around me.

Far across the meadow a shepherd passed in the wake of a huddling flock, his dog at his heels, faint moving blots of grey.

A squirrel sat up on the gravel walk in front of me, ran a few feet, and sat up again, so close that I could see the palpitation of his sleek flanks.

Somewhere in the grass a hidden field insect was rehearsing last summer's solos; I heard the tap! tap! tat-tat-t-t-tat! of a woodpecker among the branches overhead and the querulous note of a sleepy robin.

The twilight deepened; out of the city the music of bells floated over wood and meadow; faint mellow whistles sounded from the river craft along the north shore, and the distant thunder of a gun announced the close of a June day.

The end of my cigarette began to glimmer with a redder light; shepherd and flock were blotted out in the dusk, and I only knew they were still moving when the sheep bells tinkled faintly.

Then suddenly that strange uneasiness that all have known—that half-awakened sense of having seen it all before, of having been through it all, came over me, and I raised my head and slowly turned.

A figure was seated at my side. My mind was struggling with the instinct to remember. Something so vague and yet so familiar—something that eluded thought yet challenged it, something—God knows what! troubled me. And now, as I looked, without interest, at the dark figure beside me, an apprehension, totally involuntary, an impatience to *understand,* came upon me, and I sighed and turned restlessly again to the fading west.

I thought I heard my sigh re-echoed—I scarcely heeded; and in a moment I sighed again, dropping my burned-out cigarette on the gravel beneath my feet.

"Did you speak to me?" said some one in a low voice, so close that I swung around rather sharply.

"No," I said after a moment's silence.

It was a woman. I could not see her face clearly, but I saw on her clasped hands, which lay listlessly in her lap, the sparkle of a great diamond. I knew her at once. It did not need a glance at the shabby dress of black, the white face, a pallid spot in the twilight, to tell me that I had her picture in my sketch-book.

"Do—do you mind if I speak to you?" she asked timidly. The hopeless sadness in her voice touched me, and I said: "Why, no, of course not. Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes," she said, brightening a little, "if you—you only would."

"I will if I can," said I, cheerfully; "what is it? Out of ready cash?"

"No, not that," she said, shrinking back.

I begged her pardon, a little surprised, and withdrew my hand from my change pocket.

"It is only—only that I wish you to take these,"—she drew a thin packet from her breast,—"these two letters."

"I?" I asked astonished.

"Yes, if you will."

"But what am I to do with them?" I demanded.

"I can't tell you; I only know that I must give them to you. Will you take them?"

"Oh, yes, I'll take them," I laughed, "am I to read them?" I added to myself, "It's some clever begging trick."

"No," she answered slowly, "you are not to read them; you are to give them to somebody."

"To whom? Anybody?"

"No, not to anybody. You will know whom to give them to when the time comes."

"Then I am to keep them until further instructions?"

"Your own heart will instruct you," she said, in a scarcely audible voice. She held the thin packet toward me, and to humor her I took it. It was wet.

"The letters fell into the sea," she said; "there was a photograph which should have gone with them but the salt water washed it blank. Will you care if I ask you something else?"

"I? Oh, no."

"Then give me the picture that you made of me to-day."

I laughed again, and demanded how she knew I had drawn her.

"Is it like me?" she said.

"I think it is very like you," I answered truthfully.

"Will you not give it to me?"

Now it was on the tip of my tongue to refuse, but I reflected that I had enough sketches for a full page without that one, so I handed it to her, nodded that she was welcome, and stood up. She rose also, the diamond flashing on her finger.

"You are sure that you are not in want?" I asked, with a tinge of good-natured sarcasm.

"Hark!" she whispered; "listen!—do you hear the bells of the convent!"

I looked out into the misty night.

"There are no bells sounding," I said, "and anyway there are no convent bells here. We are in New York, mademoiselle"—I had noticed her French accent—"we are in Protestant Yankee-land, and the bells that ring are much less mellow than the bells of France."

I turned pleasantly to say good-night. She was gone.

III

Have you ever drawn a picture of a corpse?" inquired Jamison next morning as I walked into his private room with a sketch of the proposed full page of the Zoo.

"No, and I don't want to," I replied, sullenly.

"Let me see your Central Park page," said Jamison in his gentle voice, and I displayed it. It was about worthless as an artistic production, but it pleased Jamison, as I knew it would.

"Can you finish it by this afternoon?" he asked, looking up at me with persuasive eyes.

"Oh, I suppose so," I said, wearily; "anything else, Mr. Jamison?"

"The corpse," he replied, "I want a sketch by to-morrow—finished."

"What corpse?" I demanded, controlling my indignation as I met Jamison's soft eyes.

There was a mute duel of glances. Jamison passed his hand across his forehead with a slight lifting of the eyebrows.

"I shall want it as soon as possible," he said in his caressing voice.

What I thought was, "Damned purring pussy-cat!" What I said was, "Where is this corpse?"

"In the Morgue—have you read the morning papers? No? Ah,—as you very rightly observe you are too busy to read the morning papers. Young men must learn industry first, of course, of course. What you are to do is this: the San Francisco police have sent out an alarm regarding the disappearance of a Miss Tufft—the millionaire's daughter, you know. To-day a body was brought to the Morgue here in New York, and it has been identified as the missing young lady,—by a diamond ring. Now I am convinced that it isn't, and I'll show you why, Mr. Hilton."

He picked up a pen and made a sketch of a ring on a margin of that morning's *Tribune.*

"That is the description of her ring as sent on from San Francisco. You notice the diamond is set in the centre of the ring where the two gold serpents' *tails* cross!

"Now the ring on the finger of the woman in the Morgue is like this," and he rapidly sketched another ring where the diamond rested in the *fangs* of the two gold serpents.

"That is the difference," he said in his pleasant, even voice.

"Rings like that are not uncommon," said I, remembering that I had seen such a ring on the finger of the white-faced girl in the Park the evening before. Then a sudden thought took shape—perhaps that was the girl whose body lay in the Morgue!

"Well," said Jamison, looking up at me, "what are you thinking about?"

"Nothing," I answered, but the whole scene was before my eyes, the vultures brooding among the rocks, the shabby black dress, and the pallid face,—and the ring, glittering on that slim white hand!

"Nothing," I repeated, "when shall I go, Mr. Jamison? Do you want a portrait—or what?"

"Portrait,—careful drawing of the ring, and,—er—a centre piece of the Morgue at night. Might as well give people the horrors while we're about it."

"But," said I, "the policy of this paper—"

"Never mind, Mr. Hilton," purred Jamison, "I am able to direct the policy of this paper."

"I don't doubt you are," I said angrily.

"I am," he repeated, undisturbed and smiling; "you see this Tufft case interests society. I am—er—also interested."

He held out to me a morning paper and pointed to a heading.

I read: "Miss Tufft Dead! Her Fiancé was Mr. Jamison, the well known Editor."

"What!" I cried in horrified amazement. But Jamison had left the room, and I heard him chatting and laughing softly with some visitors in the press-room outside.

I flung down the paper and walked out.

"The cold-blooded toad!" I exclaimed again and again;—"making capital out of his fiancée's disappearance! Well, I—I'm d—nd! I knew he was a bloodless, heartless grip-penny, but I never thought—I never imagined—" Words failed me.

Scarcely conscious of what I did I drew a *Herald* from my pocket and saw the column entitled: "Miss Tufft Found! Identified by a Ring. Wild Grief of Mr. Jamison, her Fiancé."

That was enough. I went out into the street and sat down in City Hall Park. And, as I sat there, a terrible resolution came to me; I would draw that dead girl's face in such a way that it would chill Jamison's sluggish blood, I would crowd the black shadows of the Morgue with forms and ghastly faces, and every face should bear something in it of Jamison. Oh, I'd rouse him from his cold snaky apathy! I'd confront him with Death in such an awful form, that, passionless, base, inhuman as he was, he'd shrink from it as he would from a dagger thrust. Of course I'd lose my place, but that did not bother me, for I had decided to resign anyway, not having a taste for the society of human reptiles. And, as I sat there in the sunny park, furious, trying to plan a picture whose sombre horror should leave in his mind an ineffaceable scar, I suddenly thought of the pale black-robed girl in Central Park. Could it be her poor slender body that lay among the shadows of the grim Morgue! If ever brooding despair was stamped on any face, I had seen its print on hers when she spoke to me in the Park and gave me the letters. The letters! I had not thought of them since, but now I drew them from my pocket and looked at the addresses.

"Curious," I thought, "the letters are still damp; they smell of salt water too."

I looked at the address again, written in the long fine hand of an educated woman who had been bred in a French convent. Both letters bore the same address, in French:

"CAPTAIN D'YNIOL.
(Kindness of a Stranger.)"

"Captain d'Yniol," I repeated aloud—"confound it, I've heard that name! Now, where the deuce—where in the name of all that's queer—" Somebody who had sat down on the bench beside me placed a heavy hand on my shoulder.

It was the Frenchman, "Soger Charlie."

"You spoke my name," he said in apathetic tones.

"Your name!"

"Captain d'Yniol," he repeated; "it is my name."

I recognized him in spite of the black goggles he was wearing, and, at the same moment, it flashed into my mind that d'Yniol was the name of the traitor who had escaped. Ah, I remembered now!

"I am Captain d'Yniol," he said again, and I saw his fingers closing on my coat sleeve.

It may have been my involuntary movement of recoil,—I don't know,—but the fellow dropped my coat and sat straight up on the bench.

"I am Captain d'Yniol," he said for the third time, "charged with treason and under sentence of death."

"And innocent!" I muttered, before I was even conscious of having spoken. What was it that wrung those involuntary words from my lips, I shall never know, perhaps—but it was I, not he, who trembled, seized with a strange agitation, and it was I, not he, whose hand was stretched forth impulsively, touching his.

Without a tremor he took my hand, pressed it almost imperceptibly, and dropped it. Then I held both letters toward him, and, as he neither looked at them nor at me, I placed them in his hand. Then he started.

"Read them," I said, "they are for you."

"Letters!" he gasped in a voice that sounded like nothing human.

"Yes, they are for you,—I know it now—"

Letters!—letters directed to *me?*"

"Can you not see?" I cried.

Then he raised one frail hand and drew the goggles from his eyes, and, as I looked, I saw two tiny white specks exactly in the centre of both pupils.

"Blind!" I faltered.

"I have been unable to read for two years," he said.

After a moment he placed the tip of one finger on the letters.

"They are wet," I said; "shall—would you like to have me read them?" For a long time he sat silently in the sunshine, fumbling with his cane, and I watched him without speaking. At last he said, "Read, Monsieur," and I took the letters and broke the seals.

The first letter contained a sheet of paper, damp and discoloured, on which a few lines were written:

> "My darling, I knew you were innocent—" Here the writing ended, but, in the blur beneath, I read: "Paris shall know—France shall know, for at last I have the proofs and I am coming to find you, my soldier, and to place them in your own dear brave hands. They know, now, at the War Ministry—they have a copy of the traitor's confession—but they dare not make it public—they dare not withstand the popular astonishment and rage. Therefore I sail on Monday from Cherbourg by the Green Cross Line, to bring you back to your own again, where you will stand before all the world, without fear, without reproach."
>
> "ALINE."

"This—this is terrible!" I stammered; "can God live and see such things done!"

But with his thin hand he gripped my arm again, bidding me read the other letter; and I shuddered at the menace in his voice.

Then, with his sightless eyes on me, I drew the other letter from the wet, stained envelope. And before I was aware—before I understood the purport of what I saw, I had read aloud these half effaced lines:

> "The *Lorient* is sinking—an iceberg—mid-ocean—good-
> bye—you are innocent—I love—"

"The *Lorient!*" I cried; "it was the French steamer that was never heard from—the *Lorient* of the Green Cross Line! I had forgotten—I—"

The loud crash of a revolver stunned me; my ears rang and ached with it as I shrank back from a ragged dusty figure that collapsed on the bench beside me, shuddered a moment, and tumbled to the asphalt at my feet.

The trampling of the eager hard-eyed crowd, the dust and taint of powder in the hot air, the harsh alarm of the ambulance clattering up Mail Street,—these I remember, as I knelt there, helplessly holding the dead man's hands in mine.

"Soger Charlie," mused the sparrow policeman, "shot his-self, didn't he, Mr. Hilton? You seen him, sir,—blowed the top of his head off, didn't he, Mr. Hilton?"

"Soger Charlie," they repeated, "a French dago what shot his-self;" and the words echoed in my ears long after the ambulance rattled away, and the increasing throng dispersed, sullenly, as a couple of policemen cleared a space around the pool of thick blood on the asphalt.

They wanted me as a witness, and I gave my card to one of the policemen who knew me. The rabble transferred its fascinated stare to me, and I turned away and pushed a path between frightened shop girls and ill-smelling loafers, until I lost myself in the human torrent of Broadway.

The torrent took me with it where it flowed—East? West?—I did not notice nor care, but I passed on through the throng, listless, deadly weary of attempting so solve God's justice—striving to understand His purpose—His laws—His judgments which are "true and righteous altogether."

IV

More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb!"

I turned sharply toward the speaker who shambled at my elbow. His sunken eyes were dull and lustreless, his bloodless face gleamed pallid as a death mask above the blood-red jersey—the emblem of the soldiers of Christ.

I don't know why I stopped, lingering, but, as he passed, I said, "Brother, I also was meditating upon God's wisdom and His testimonies."

The pale fanatic shot a glance at me, hesitated, and fell into my own pace, walking by my side. Under the peak of his Salvation Army cap his eyes shone in the shadow with a strange light.

"Tell me more," I said, sinking my voice below the roar of traffic, the clang! clang! of the cable-cars, and the noise of feet on the worn pavements—"tell me of His testimonies."

"Moreover by them is Thy servant warned and in keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand His errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me. Then shall I be upright and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight,—O Lord! My strength and my Redeemer!"

"It is Holy Scripture that you quote," I said; "I also can read that when I choose. But it cannot clear for me the reasons—it cannot make me understand—"

"What?" he asked, and muttered to himself.

"That, for instance," I replied, pointing to a cripple, who had been *born* deaf and dumb and horridly misshapen,—a wretched diseased lump on the sidewalk below St. Paul's Churchyard,—a sore-eyed thing that mouthed and mowed and rattled pennies in a tin cup as though the sound of copper could stem the human pack that passed hot on the scent of gold.

Then the man who shambled beside me turned and looked long and earnestly into my eyes. And after a moment a dull recollection stirred within me—a vague something that seemed like the awakening memory of a past, long, long forgotten, dim, dark, too subtle, too frail, too indefinite—ah! the old feeling that all men have known—the old strange uneasiness, that useless struggle to remember when and where it all occurred before.

And the man's head sank on his crimson jersey, and he muttered, muttered to himself of God and love and compassion, until I saw that the fierce heat of the city had touched his brain, and I went away and left him prating of mysteries that none but such as he dare name.

So I passed on through dust and heat; and the hot breath of men touched my cheek and eager eyes looked into mine. Eyes, eyes,—that met my own and looked through them, beyond—far beyond to where gold glittered amid the mirage of eternal hope. Gold! It was in the air where the soft sunlight gilded the floating moats, it was under foot in the dust that the sun made gilt, it glimmered from every window pane where the long red beams struck golden sparks above the gasping gold-hunting hordes of Wall Street.

High, high, in the deepening sky the tall buildings towered, and the breeze from the bay lifted the sun-dyed flags of commerce until they waved above the turmoil of the hives below—waved courage and hope and strength to those who lusted after gold.

The sun dipped low behind Castle William as I turned listlessly into the Battery, and the long straight shadows of the trees stretched away over greensward and asphalt walk.

Already the electric lights were glimmering among the foliage although the bay shimmered like polished brass and the topsails of the ships glowed with a deeper hue, where the red sun rays fall athwart the rigging.

Old men tottered along the sea-wall, tapping the asphalt with worn canes, old women crept to and fro in the coming twilight,—old women who carried baskets that gaped for charity or bulged with mouldy stuffs,—food, clothing?—I could not tell; I did not care to know.

The heavy thunder from the parapets of Castle William died away over the placid bay, the last red arm of the sun shot up out of the sea, and wavered and faded into the sombre tones of the afterglow. Then came the night, timidly at first, touching sky and water with grey fingers, folding the foliage into soft massed shapes, creeping onward, onward, more swiftly now, until colour and form had gone from all the earth and the world was a world of shadows.

And, as I sat there on the dusky sea-wall, gradually the bitter thoughts faded and I looked out into the calm night with something of that peace that comes to all when day is ended.

The death at my very elbow of the poor blind wretch in the Park had left a shock, but now my nerves relaxed their tension and I began to think about it all,—about the letters and the strange woman who had given them to me. I wondered where she had found them,—whether they really were carried by some vagrant current in to the shore from the wreck of the fated *Lorient*.

Nothing but these letters had human eyes encountered from the *Lorient*, although we believed that fire or berg had been her portion; for there had been no storms when the *Lorient* steamed away from Cherbourg.

And what of the pale-faced girl in black who had given these letters to me, saying that my own heart would teach me where to place them?

I felt in my pockets for the letters where I had thrust them all crumpled and wet. They were there, and I decided to turn them over to the police. Then I thought of Cusick and the City Hall Park and these set my mind running on Jamison and my own work,—ah! I had forgotten that,—I had forgotten that I had sworn to stir Jamison's cold, sluggish blood! Trading on his fiancée's reported suicide,—or murder! True, he had told me that he was satisfied that the body at the Morgue was not Miss Tufft's because the ring did not correspond with his fiancée's ring. But what sort of a man was that!—to go crawling and nosing about morgues and graves for a full-page illustration which might sell a few extra thousand papers. I had never known he was such a man. It was strange too—for that was not the sort of illustration that the *Weekly* used; it was against all precedent—against the whole policy of the paper. He would lose a hundred subscribers where he would gain one by such work.

"The callous brute!" I muttered to myself, "I'll wake him up—I'll—"

I sat straight up on the bench and looked steadily at a figure which was moving toward me under the spluttering electric light.

It was the woman I had met in the Park.

She came straight up to me, her pale face gleaming like marble in the dark, her slim hands outstretched.

"I have been looking for you all day—all day," she said, in the same low thrilling tones,—"I want the letters back; have you them here?"

"Yes," I said, "I have them here,—take them in Heaven's name; they have done enough evil for one day!"

She took the letters from my hand; I saw the ring, made of the double serpents, flashing on her slim finger, and I stepped closer, and looked her in the eyes.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I? My name is of no importance to you," she answered.

"You are right," I said, "I do not care to know your name. That ring of yours—"

"What of my ring?" she murmured.

"Nothing,—a dead woman lying in the Morgue wears such a ring. Do you know what your letters have done? No? Well I read them to a miserable wretch and he blew his brains out!"

"You read them to a man!"

"I did. He killed himself."

"Who was that man?"

"Captain d'Yniol—"

With something between a sob and a laugh she seized my hand and covered it with kisses, and I, astonished and angry, pulled my hand away from her cold lips and sat down on the bench.

"You needn't thank me," I said sharply; "if I had known that,—but no matter. Perhaps after all the poor devil is better off somewhere in other regions with his sweetheart who was drowned,—yes, I imagine he is. He was blind and ill,—and broken-hearted."

"Blind?" she asked gently.

"Yes. Did you know him?"

"I knew him."

"And his sweetheart, Aline?"

"Aline," she repeated softly,—"she is dead. I come to thank you in her name."

"For what?—for his death?"

"Ah, yes, for that."

"Where did you get those letters?" I asked her, suddenly.

She did not answer, but stood fingering the wet letters.

Before I could speak again she moved away into the shadows of the trees, lightly, silently, and far down the dark walk I saw her diamond flashing.

Grimly brooding, I rose and passed through the Battery to the steps of the Elevated Road. These I climbed, bought my ticket, and stepped out to the damp platform. When a train came I crowded in with the rest, still pondering on my vengeance, feeling and believing that I was to scourge the conscience of the man who speculated on death.

And at last the train stopped at 28th Street, and I hurried out and down the steps and away to the Morgue.

When I entered the Morgue, Skelton, the keeper, was standing before a slab that glistened faintly under the wretched gas jets. He heard my footsteps, and turned around to see who was coming. Then he nodded, saying: "Mr. Hilton, just take a look at this here stiff—I'll be back in a moment—this is the one that all the papers take to be Miss Tufft,—but they're all off, because this stiff has been here now for two weeks."

I drew out my sketching-block and pencils.

"Which is it, Skelton?" I asked, fumbling for my rubber.

"This one, Mr. Hilton, the girl what's smilin'. Picked up off Sandy Hook, too. Looks as if she was asleep, eh?"

"What's she got in her hand—clenched tight? Oh,—a letter. Turn up the gas, Skelton, I want to see her face."

The old man turned the gas jet, and the flame blazed and whistled in the damp, fetid air. Then suddenly my eyes fell on the dead.

Rigid, scarcely breathing, I stared at the ring, made of two twisted serpents set with a great diamond,—I saw the wet letters crushed in her slender hand,—I looked, and—God help me!—I looked upon the dead face of the girl with whom I had been speaking on the Battery!

"Dead for a month at least," said Skelton, calmly.

Then, as I felt my senses leaving me, I screamed out, and at the same instant somebody from behind seized my shoulder and shook me savagely—shook me until I opened my eyes again and gasped and coughed.

"Now then, young feller!" said a Park policeman bending over me, "if you go to sleep on a bench, somebody 'll lift your watch!"

I turned, rubbing my eyes desperately.

Then it was all a dream—and no shrinking girl had come to me with damp letters,—I had not gone to the office—there was no such person as Miss Tufft,—Jamison was not an unfeeling villain,—no, indeed!—he treated us all much better than we deserved, and he was kind and generous too. And the ghastly suicide! Thank God that also was a myth,—and the Morgue and the Battery at night where that pale-faced girl had—ugh!

I felt for my sketch-block, found it; turned the pages of all the animals that I had sketched, the hippopotami, the buffalo, the tigers—ah! where was that sketch in which I had made the woman in shabby black the principal figure, with the brooding vultures all around and the crowd in the sunshine—? It was gone.

I hunted everywhere, in every pocket. It was gone.

At last I rose and moved along the narrow asphalt path in the falling twilight.

And as I turned into the broader walk, I was aware of a group, a policeman holding a lantern, some gardeners, and a knot of loungers gathered about something,—a dark mass on the ground.

"Found 'em just so," one of the gardeners was saying, "better not touch 'em until the coroner comes."

The policeman shifted his bull's-eye a little; the rays fell on two faces, on two bodies, half supported against a park bench. On the finger of the girl glittered a splendid diamond, set between the fangs of two gold serpents. The man had shot himself; he clasped two wet letters in his hand. The girl's clothing and hair were wringing wet, and her face was the face of a drowned person.

"Well, sir," said the policeman, looking at me; "you seem to know these two people—by your looks—"

"I never saw them before," I gasped, and walked on, trembling in every nerve.

For among the folds of her shabby black dress I had noticed the end of a paper,—my sketch that I had missed! ⁂

The Mystery of Choice

DEDICATION

There is a maid, demure as she is wise,
With all of April in her winsome eyes,
And to my tales she listens pensively,
With slender fingers clasped about her knee,
Watching the sparrows on the balcony.

Shy eyes that, lifted up to me,
Free all my heart of vanity;
Clear eyes, that speak all silently,
Sweet as the silence of a nunnery—
Read, for I write my rede for you alone,
Here where the city's mighty monotone
Deepens the silence to a symphony—
Silence of Saints, and Seers, and Sorcery.

Arms and the Man! A noble theme, I ween!
Alas! I can not sing of these, Eileen—
Only of maids and men and meadow-grass,
Of sea and fields and woodlands, where I pass;
Nothing but these I know, Eileen, alas!

Clear eyes that, lifted up to me,
Free all my soul from vanity;
Gray eyes, that speak all wistfully—
Nothing but these I know, alas!
R. W. C.

April, 1896.

INTRODUCTION

I

Where two fair paths, deep flowered
And leaf-embowered,
Creep East and West across a World concealed,
Which shall he take who journeys far afield?

II

Canst thou then say, "I go,"
Or "I forego"?
What turns thee East or West, as thistles blow?
Is fair more fair than fair—and dost thou know?

III

Turn to the West, unblessed
And uncaressed;
Turn to the East, and seated at the Feast
Thou shalt find Life, or Death from Life released.

IV

And thou who lovest best
A maid dark-tressed,
And passest others by with careless eye,
Canst thou tell why thou choosest? Tell, then; why?

V

So when thy kiss is given
Or half-forgiven,
Why should she tremble, with her face flame-hot,
Or laugh and whisper, "Love, I tremble not"?

VI

Or when thy hand may catch
A half-drawn latch,
What draws thee from the door, to turn and pass
Through streets unknown, dim, still, and choked with grass?

VII

What! Canst thou not foresee
The Mystery?
Heed! For a Voice commands thy every deed!
And it hath sounded. And thou needs must heed!
R. W. C.
1896.

The Mystery of Choice
(selections)

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THE KEY TO GRIEF 250

Book Publication 1897

The Purple Emperor

Un souvenir heureux est peut-être, sur terre,
Plus vrai que le bonheur.

A. de Musset.

I

The Purple Emperor watched me in silence. I cast again, spinning out six feet more of waterproof silk, and, as the line hissed through the air far across the pool, I saw my three flies fall on the water like drifting thistledown. The Purple Emperor sneered.

"You see," he said, "I am right. There is not a trout in Brittany that will rise to a tailed fly."

"They do in America," I replied.

"Zut! for America!" observed the Purple Emperor.

"And trout take a tailed fly in England," I insisted sharply.

"Now do I care what things or people do in England?" demanded the Purple Emperor.

"You don't care for anything except yourself and your wriggling caterpillars," I said, more annoyed than I had yet been.

The Purple Emperor sniffed. His broad, hairless, sunburnt features bore that obstinate expression which always irritated me. Perhaps the manner in which he wore his hat intensified the irritation, for the flapping brim rested on both ears, and the two little velvet ribbons which hung from the silver buckle in front wiggled and fluttered with every trivial breeze. His cunning eyes and sharp-pointed nose were out of all keeping with his fat red face. When he met my eye, he chuckled.

"I know more about insects than any man in Morbihan—or Finistère either, for that matter," he said.

"The Red Admiral knows as much as you do," I retorted.

"He doesn't," replied the Purple Emperor angrily.

"And his collection of butterflies is twice as large as yours," I added, moving down the stream to a spot directly opposite him.

"It is, is it?" sneered the Purple Emperor. "Well, let me tell you, Monsieur Darrel, in all his collection he hasn't a specimen, a single specimen, of that magnificent butterfly, *Apatura Iris*, commonly known as the 'Purple Emperor.'"

"Everybody in Brittany knows that," I said, casting across the sparkling water; "but just because you happen to be the only man who ever captured a 'Purple Emperor' in Morbihan, it doesn't follow that you are an authority on sea-trout flies. Why do you say that a Breton sea-trout won't touch a tailed fly?"

"It's so," he replied.

"Why? There are plenty of May-flies about the stream."

"Let 'em fly!" snarled the Purple Emperor, "you won't see a trout touch 'em."

My arm was aching, but I grasped my split bamboo more firmly, and, half turning, waded out into the stream and began to whip the ripples at the head of the pool. A great green dragon-fly came drifting by on the summer breeze and hung a moment above the pool, glittering like an emerald.

"There's a chance! Where is your butterfly net?" I called across the stream.

"What for? That dragon-fly? I've got dozens—*Anax Junius*, Drury, characteristic, anal angle of posterior wings, in male, round; thorax marked with—"

"That will do," I said fiercely. "Can't I point out an insect in the air without this burst of erudition? Can you tell me, in simple everyday French, what this little fly is—this one, flitting over the eel grass here beside me? See, it has fallen on the water."

"Huh!" sneered the Purple Emperor, "that's a *Linnobia Annulus.*"

"What's that?" I demanded.

Before he could answer there came a heavy splash in the pool, and the fly disappeared.

"He! he! he!" tittered the Purple Emperor. "Didn't I tell you the fish knew their business? That was a sea-trout. I hope you don't get him."

He gathered up his butterfly net, collecting box, chloroform bottle, and cyanide jar. Then he rose, swung the box over his shoulder, stuffed the poison bottles into the pockets of his silver-buttoned velvet coat, and lighted his pipe. This latter operation was a demoralizing spectacle, for the Purple Emperor, like all Breton peasants, smoked one of those microscopical Breton pipes which requires ten minutes to find, ten minutes to fill, ten minutes to light, and ten seconds to finish. With true Breton stolidity he went through this solemn rite, blew three puffs of smoke into the air, scratched his pointed nose reflectively, and waddled away, calling back an ironical "Au revoir, and bad luck to all Yankees!"

I watched him out of sight, thinking sadly of the young girl whose life he made a hell upon earth—Lys Trevec, his niece. She never admitted it, but we all knew what the black-and-blue marks meant on her soft, round arm, and it made me sick to see the look of fear come into her eyes when the Purple Emperor waddled into the café of the Groix Inn.

It was commonly said that he half-starved her. This she denied. Marie Joseph and 'Fine Lelocard had seen him strike her the day after the Pardon of the Birds because she had liberated three bullfinches which he had limed the day before. I asked Lys if this were true, and she refused to speak to me for the rest of the week. There was nothing to do about it. If the Purple Emperor had not been avaricious, I should never have seen Lys at all, but he could not resist the thirty francs a week which I offered him; and Lys posed for me all day long, happy as a linnet in a pink thorn hedge. Nevertheless, the Purple Emperor hated me, and constantly threatened to send Lys back to her dreary flax-spinning. He was suspicious, too, and when he had gulped down the single glass of cider which proves fatal to the sobriety of most Bretons, he would pound the long, discoloured oaken table and roar curses on me, on Yves Terrec, and on the Red Admiral. We were the three objects in the world which he most hated: me, because I was a foreigner, and didn't care a rap for him and his butterflies; and the Red Admiral, because he was a rival entomologist.

He had other reasons for hating Terrec.

The Red Admiral, a little wizened wretch, with a badly adjusted glass eye and a passion for brandy, took his name from a butterfly which predominated in his collection. This butterfly, commonly known to amateurs as the "Red Admiral," and to entomologists as *Vanessa Atalanta*, had been the occasion of scandal among the entomologists of France and Brittany. For the Red Admiral had taken one of these common insects, dyed it a brilliant yellow by the aid of chemicals, and palmed it off on a credulous collector as a South African species, absolutely unique. The fifty francs which he gained by this rascality were, however, absorbed in a suit for damages brought by the outraged amateur a month later; and when he had sat in the Quimperlé jail for a month, he reappeared in the little village of St. Gildas soured, thirsty, and burning for revenge. Of course we named him the Red Admiral, and he accepted the name with suppressed fury.

The Purple Emperor, on the other hand, had gained his imperial title legitimately, for it was an undisputed fact that the only specimen of that beautiful butterfly, *Apatura Iris*, or the Purple Emperor, as it is called by amateurs—the only specimen that had ever been taken in Finistère or in Morbihan—was captured and brought home alive by Joseph Marie Gloanec, ever afterward to be known as the Purple Emperor.

When the capture of this rare butterfly became known the Red Admiral nearly went crazy. Every day for a week he trotted over to the Groix Inn, where the Purple Emperor lived with his niece, and brought his microscope to bear on the rare newly captured butterfly, in hopes of detecting a fraud. But this specimen was genuine, and he leered through his microscope in vain.

"No chemicals there, Admiral," grinned the Purple Emperor; and the Red Admiral chattered with rage.

To the scientific world of Brittany and France the capture of an *Apatura Iris* in Morbihan was of great importance. The Museum of Quimper offered to purchase the butterfly, but the Purple Emperor, though a hoarder of gold, was a monomaniac on butterflies, and he jeered at the Curator of the Museum. From all parts of Brittany and France letters of inquiry and congratulation poured in upon him. The French Academy of Sciences awarded him a prize, and the Paris Entomological Society made him an honorary member. Being a Breton peasant, and a more than commonly pig-headed one at that, these honours did not disturb his equanimity; but when the little hamlet of St. Gildas elected him mayor, and, as is the custom in Brittany under such circumstances, he left his thatched house to take up an official life in the little Groix Inn, his head became completely turned. To be mayor in a village of nearly one hundred and fifty people! It was an empire! So he became unbearable, drinking himself viciously drunk every night of his life, maltreating his niece, Lys Trevec, like the barbarous old wretch that he was, and driving the Red Admiral nearly frantic with his eternal harping on the capture of *Apatura Iris.* Of course he refused to tell where he had caught the butterfly. The Red Admiral stalked his footsteps, but in vain.

"He! he! he!" nagged the Purple Emperor, cuddling his chin over a glass of cider; "I saw you sneaking about the St. Gildas spinney yesterday morning. So you think you can find another *Apatura Iris* by running after me? It won't do, Admiral, it won't do, d'ye see?"

The Red Admiral turned yellow with mortification and envy, but the next day he actually took to his bed, for the Purple Emperor had brought home not a butterfly but a live chrysalis, which, if successfully hatched, would become a perfect specimen of the invaluable *Apatura Iris.* This was the last straw. The Red Admiral shut himself up in his little stone cottage, and for weeks now he had been invisible to everybody except 'Fine Lelocard who carried him a loaf of bread and a mullet or langouste every morning.

The withdrawal of the Red Admiral from the society of St. Gildas excited first the derision and finally the suspicion of the Purple Emperor. What deviltry could he be hatching? Was he experimenting with chemicals again, or was he engaged in some deeper plot, the object of which was to discredit the Purple Emperor? Roux, the postman, who carried the mail on foot once a day from Bannalec, a distance of fifteen miles each way, had brought several suspicious letters, bearing English stamps, to the Red Admiral, and the next day the Admiral had been observed at his window grinning up into the sky and rubbing his hands together. A night or two after this apparition the postman left two packages at the Groix Inn for a moment while he ran across the way to drink a glass of cider with me. The Purple Emperor, who was roaming about the café, snooping into everything that did not concern him, came upon the packages and examined the postmarks and addresses. One of the packages was square and heavy, and felt like a book. The other was also square, but very light, and felt like a pasteboard box. They were both addressed to the Red Admiral, and they bore English stamps.

When Roux, the postman, came back, the Purple Emperor tried to pump him, but the poor little postman knew nothing about the contents of the packages, and after he had taken them around the corner to the cottage of the Red Admiral the Purple Emperor ordered a glass of cider, and deliberately fuddled himself until Lys came in and tearfully supported him to his room. Here he became so abusive and brutal that Lys called to me, and I went and settled the trouble without wasting any words. This also the Purple Emperor remembered, and waited his chance to get even with me.

That had happened a week ago, and until to-day he had not deigned to speak to me.

Lys had posed for me all the week, and to-day being Saturday, and I lazy, we had decided to take a little relaxation, she to visit and gossip with her little black-eyed friend Yvette in the neighbouring hamlet of St. Julien, and I to try the appetites of the Breton trout with the contents of my American fly book.

I had thrashed the stream very conscientiously for three hours, but not a trout had risen to my cast, and I was piqued. I had begun to believe that there were no trout in the St. Gildas stream, and would probably have given up had I not seen the sea-trout snap the little fly which the Purple Emperor had named so scientifically. That set me thinking. Probably the Purple Emperor was right, for he certainly was an expert in everything that crawled and wriggled in Brittany. So I matched, from my American fly book, the fly that the sea-trout had snapped up, and withdrawing the cast of three, knotted a new leader to the silk and slipped a fly on the loop. It was a queer fly. It was one of those unnameable experiments which fascinate anglers in sporting stores and which generally prove utterly useless. Moreover, it was a tailed fly, but of course I easily remedied that with a stroke of my penknife. Then I was all ready, and I stepped out into the hurrying rapids and cast straight as an arrow to the spot where the sea-trout had risen. Lightly as a plume the fly settled on the bosom of the pool; then came a startling splash, a gleam of silver, and the line tightened from the vibrating rod-tip to the shrieking reel. Almost instantly I checked the fish, and as he floundered for a moment, making the water boil along his glittering sides, I sprang to the bank again, for I saw that the fish was a heavy one and I should probably be in for a long run down the stream. The five-ounce rod swept in a splendid circle, quivering under the strain. "Oh, for a gaff-hook!" I cried aloud, for I was now firmly convinced that I had a salmon to deal with, and no sea-trout at all.

Then as I stood, bringing every ounce to bear on the sulking fish, a lithe, slender girl came hurriedly along the opposite bank calling out to me by name.

"Why, Lys!" I said, glancing up for a second, "I thought you were at St. Julien with Yvette."

"Yvette has gone to Bannalec. I went home and found an awful fight going on at the Groix Inn, and I was so frightened that I came to tell you."

The fish dashed off at that moment, carrying all the line my reel held, and I was compelled to follow him at a jump. Lys, active and graceful as a young deer, in spite of her Pont-Aven sabots, followed along the opposite bank until the fish settled in a deep pool, shook the line savagely once or twice, and then relapsed into the sulks.

"Fight at the Groix Inn?" I called across the water. "What fight?"

"Not exactly fight," quavered Lys, "but the Red Admiral has come out of his house at last, and he and my uncle are drinking together and disputing about butterflies. I never saw my uncle so angry, and the Red Admiral is sneering and grinning. Oh, it is almost wicked to see such a face!"

"But Lys," I said, scarcely able to repress a smile, "your uncle and the Red Admiral are always quarrelling and drinking."

"I know—oh, dear me!—but this is different, Monsieur Darrel. The Red Admiral has grown old and fierce since he shut himself up three weeks ago, and—oh, dear! I never saw such a look in my uncle's eyes before. He seemed insane with fury. His eyes—I can't speak of it—and then Terrec came in."

"Oh," I said more gravely, "that was unfortunate. What did the Red Admiral say to his son?"

Lys sat down on a rock among the ferns, and gave me a mutinous glance from her blue eyes.

Yves Terrec, loafer, poacher, and son of Louis Jean Terrec, otherwise the Red Admiral, had been kicked out by his father, and had also been forbidden the village by the Purple Emperor, in his majestic capacity of mayor. Twice the young ruffian had returned: once to rifle the bedroom of the Purple Emperor—an unsuccessful enterprise—and another time to rob his own father. He succeeded in the latter attempt, but was never caught, although he was frequently seen roving about the forests and moors with his gun. He openly menaced the Purple Emperor; vowed that he would marry Lys in spite of all the gendarmes in Quimperlé; and these same gendarmes he led many a long chase through brier-filled swamps and over miles of yellow gorse.

What he did to the Purple Emperor—what he intended to do—disquieted me but little; but I worried over his threat concerning Lys. During the last three months this had bothered me a great deal; for when Lys came to St. Gildas from the convent the first thing she captured was my heart. For a long time I had refused to believe that any tie of blood linked this dainty blue-eyed creature with the Purple Emperor. Although she dressed in the velvet-laced bodice and blue petticoat of Finistère, and wore the bewitching white coiffe of St. Gildas, it seemed like a pretty masquerade. To me she was as sweet and as gently bred as many a maiden of the noble Faubourg who danced with her cousins at a Louis XV fête champêtre. So when Lys said that Yves Terrec had returned openly to St. Gildas, I felt that I had better be there also.

"What did Terrec say, Lys?" I asked, watching the line vibrating above the placid pool.

The wild rose colour crept into her cheeks. "Oh," she answered, with a little toss of her chin, "you know what he always says."

"That he will carry you away?"

"Yes."

"In spite of the Purple Emperor, the Red Admiral, and the gendarmes?"

"Yes."

"And what do you say, Lys?"

"I? Oh, nothing."

"Then let me say it for you."

Lys looked at her delicate pointed sabots, the sabots from Pont-Aven, made to order. They fitted her little foot. They were her only luxury.

"Will you let me answer for you, Lys?" I asked.

"You, Monsieur Darrel?"

"Yes. Will you let me give him his answer?"

"Mon Dieu, why should you concern yourself, Monsieur Darrel?"

The fish lay very quiet, but the rod in my hand trembled.

"Because I love you, Lys."

The wild rose colour in her cheeks deepened; she gave a gentle gasp, then hid her curly head in her hands.

"I love you, Lys."

"Do you know what you say?" she stammered.

"Yes, I love you."

She raised her sweet face and looked at me across the pool.

"I love you," she said, while the tears stood like stars in her eyes. "Shall I come over the brook to you?"

II

That night Yves Terrec left the village of St. Gildas vowing vengeance against his father, who refused him shelter.

I can see him now, standing in the road, his bare legs rising like pillars of bronze from his straw-stuffed sabots, his short velvet jacket torn and soiled by exposure and dissipation, and his eyes, fierce, roving, bloodshot—while the Red Admiral squeaked curses on him, and hobbled away into his little stone cottage.

"I will not forget you!" cried Yves Terrec, and stretched out his hand toward his father with a terrible gesture. Then he whipped his gun to his cheek and took a short step forward, but I caught him by the throat before he could fire, and a second later we were rolling in the dust of the Bannalec road. I had to hit him a heavy blow behind the ear before he would let go, and then, rising and shaking myself, I dashed his muzzle-loading fowling piece to bits against a wall, and threw his knife into the river. The Purple Emperor was looking on with a queer light in his eyes. It was plain that he was sorry Terrec had not choked me to death.

"He would have killed his father," I said, as I passed him, going toward the Groix Inn.

"That's his business," snarled the Purple Emperor. There was a deadly light in his eyes. For a moment I thought he was going to attack me; but he was merely viciously drunk, so I shoved him out of my way and went to bed, tired and disgusted.

The worst of it was I couldn't sleep, for I feared that the Purple Emperor might begin to abuse Lys. I lay restlessly tossing among the sheets until I could stay there no longer. I did not dress entirely; I merely slipped on a pair of chaussons and sabots, a pair of knickerbockers, a jersey, and a cap. Then, loosely tying a handkerchief about my throat, I went down the worm-eaten stairs and out into the moonlit road. There was a candle flaring in the Purple Emperor's window, but I could not see him.

"He's probably dead drunk," I thought, and looked up at the window where, three years before, I had first seen Lys.

"Asleep, thank Heaven!" I muttered, and wandered out along the road. Passing the small cottage of the Red Admiral, I saw that it was dark, but the door was open. I stepped inside the hedge to shut it, thinking, in case Yves Terrec should be roving about, his father would lose whatever he had left.

Then, after fastening the door with a stone, I wandered on through the dazzling Breton moonlight. A nightingale was singing in a willow swamp below, and from the edge of the mere, among the tall swamp grasses, myriads of frogs chanted a bass chorus.

When I returned, the eastern sky was beginning to lighten, and across the meadows on the cliffs, outlined against the paling horizon, I saw a seaweed gatherer going to his work among the curling breakers on the coast. His long rake was balanced on his shoulder, and the sea wind carried his song across the meadows to me:

St. Gildas!
St. Gildas!
Pray for us,
Shelter us,
Us who toil in the sea.

Passing the shrine at the entrance of the village, I took off my cap and knelt in prayer to Our Lady of Faöuet; and if I neglected myself in that prayer, surely I believed Our Lady of Faöuet would be kinder to Lys. It is said that the shrine casts white shadows. I looked, but saw only the moonlight. Then very peacefully I went to bed again, and was only awakened by the clank of sabres and the trample of horses in the road below my window.

"Good gracious!" I thought, "it must be eleven o'clock, for there are the gendarmes from Quimperlé."

I looked at my watch; it was only half-past eight, and as the gendarmes made their rounds every Thursday at eleven, I wondered what had brought them out so early to St. Gildas.

"Of course," I grumbled, rubbing my eyes, "they are after Terrec," and I jumped into my limited bath.

Before I was completely dressed I heard a timid knock, and opening my door, razor in hand, stood astonished and silent. Lys, her blue eyes wide with terror, leaned on the threshold.

"My darling!" I cried, "what on earth is the matter?" But she only clung to me, panting like a wounded sea gull. At last, when I drew her into the room and raised her face to mine, she spoke in a heart-breaking voice:

"Oh, Dick! they are going to arrest you, but I will die before I believe one word of what they say. No, don't ask me," and she began to sob desperately.

When I found that something really serious was the matter, I flung on my coat and cap, and, slipping one arm about her waist, went down the stairs and out into the road. Four gendarmes sat on their horses in front of the café door; beyond them, the entire population of St. Gildas gaped, ten deep.

"Hello, Durand!" I said to the brigadier, "what the devil is this I hear about arresting me?"

"It's true, mon ami," replied Durand with sepulchral sympathy. I looked him over from the tip of his spurred boots to his sulphur-yellow sabre belt, then upward, button by button, to his disconcerted face.

"What for?" I said scornfully. "Don't try any cheap sleuth work on me! Speak up, man, what's the trouble?"

The Purple Emperor, who sat in the doorway staring at me, started to speak, but thought better of it and got up and went into the house. The gendarmes rolled their eyes mysteriously and looked wise.

"Come, Durand," I said impatiently, "what's the charge?'

"Murder," he said in a faint voice.

"What!" I cried incredulously. "Nonsense! Do I look like a murderer? Get off your horse, you stupid, and tell me who's murdered."

Durand got down, looking very silly, and came up to me, offering his hand with a propitiatory grin.

"It was the Purple Emperor who denounced you! See, they found your handkerchief at his door—"

"Whose door, for Heaven's sake?" I cried.

"Why, the Red Admiral's!"

"The Red Admiral's? What has he done?"

"Nothing—he's only been murdered."

I could scarcely believe my senses, although they took me over to the little stone cottage and pointed out the blood-spattered room. But the horror of the thing was that the corpse of the murdered man had disappeared, and there only remained a nauseating lake of blood on the stone floor, in the centre of which lay a human hand. There was no doubt as to whom the hand belonged, for everybody who had ever seen the Red Admiral knew that the shrivelled bit of flesh which lay in the thickening blood was the hand of the Red Admiral. To me it looked like the severed claw of some gigantic bird.

"Well," I said, "there's been murder committed. Why don't you do something?"

"What?" asked Durand.

"I don't know. Send for the Commissaire."

"He's at Quimperlé. I telegraphed."

"Then send for a doctor, and find out how long this blood has been coagulating."

"The chemist from Quimperlé is here; he's a doctor."

"What does he say?"

"He says that he doesn't know."

"And who are you going to arrest?" I inquired, turning away from the spectacle on the floor.

"I don't know," said the brigadier solemnly; "you are denounced by the Purple Emperor, because he found your handkerchief at the door when he went out this morning."

"Just like a pig-headed Breton!" I exclaimed, thoroughly angry. "Did he not mention Yves Terrec?"

"No."

"Of course not," I said. "He overlooked the fact that Terrec tried to shoot his father last night, and that I took away his gun. All that counts for nothing when he finds my handkerchief at the murdered man's door."

"Come into the café," said Durand, much disturbed, "we can talk it over, there. Of course, Monsieur Darrel, I have never had the faintest idea that you were the murderer!"

The four gendarmes and I walked across the road to the Groix Inn and entered the café. It was crowded with Bretons, smoking, drinking, and jabbering in half a dozen dialects, all equally unsatisfactory to a civilized ear; and I pushed through the crowd to where little Max Fortin, the chemist of Quimperlé, stood smoking a vile cigar.

"This is a bad business," he said, shaking hands and offering me the mate to his cigar, which I politely declined.

"Now, Monsieur Fortin," I said, "it appears that the Purple Emperor found my handkerchief near the murdered man's door this morning, and so he concludes"—here I glared at the Purple Emperor—"that I am the assassin. I will now ask him a question," and turning on him suddenly, I shouted, "What were you doing at the Red Admiral's door?"

The Purple Emperor started and turned pale, and I pointed at him triumphantly.

"See what a sudden question will do. Look how embarrassed he is, and yet I do not charge him with murder; and I tell you, gentlemen, that man there knows as well as I do who was the murderer of the Red Admiral!"

"I don't!" bawled the Purple Emperor.

"You do," I said. "It was Yves Terrec."

"I don't believe it," he said obstinately, dropping his voice.

"Of course not, being pig-headed."

"I am not pig-headed," he roared again, "but I am mayor of St. Gildas, and I do not believe that Yves Terrec killed his father."

"You saw him try to kill him last night?"

The mayor grunted.

"And you saw what I did."

He grunted again.

"And," I went on, "you heard Yves Terrec threaten to kill his father. You heard him curse the Red Admiral and swear to kill him. Now the father is murdered and his body is gone."

"And your handkerchief?" sneered the Purple Emperor.

"I dropped it, of course."

"And the seaweed gatherer who saw you last night lurking about the Red Admiral's cottage," grinned the Purple Emperor.

I was startled at the man's malice.

"That will do," I said. "It is perfectly true that I was walking on the Bannalec road last night, and that I stopped to close the Red Admiral's door, which was ajar, although his light was not burning. After that I went up the road to the Dinez Woods, and then walked over by St. Julien, whence I saw the seaweed gatherer on the cliffs. He was near enough for me to hear what he sang. What of that?"

"What did you do then?'

"Then I stopped at the shrine and said a prayer, and then I went to bed and slept until Brigadier Durand's gendarmes awoke me with their clatter."

"Now, Monsieur Darrel," said the Purple Emperor, lifting a fat finger and shooting a wicked glance at me, "Now, Monsieur Darrel, which did you wear last night on your midnight stroll—sabots or shoes?"

I thought a moment. "Shoes—no, sabots. I just slipped on my chaussons and went out in my sabots."

"Which was it, shoes or sabots?" snarled the Purple Emperor.

"Sabots, you fool."

"Are these your sabots?" he asked, lifting up a wooden shoe with my initials cut on the instep.

"Yes," I replied.

"Then how did this blood come on the other one?" he shouted, and held up a sabot, the mate to the first, on which a drop of blood had spattered.

"I haven't the least idea," I said calmly; but my heart was beating very fast and I was furiously angry.

"You blockhead!" I said, controlling my rage, "I'll make you pay for this when they catch Yves Terrec and convict him. Brigadier Durand, do you duty if you think I am under suspicion. Arrest me, but grant me one favour. Put me in the Red Admiral's cottage, and I'll see whether I can't find some clew that you have overlooked. Of course, I won't disturb anything until the Commissaire arrives. Bah! You all make me very ill."

"He's hardened," observed the Purple Emperor, wagging his head.

"What motive had I to kill the Red Admiral?" I asked them all scornfully. And they all cried:

"None! Yves Terrec is the man!"

Passing out of the door I swung around and shook my finger at the Purple Emperor.

"Oh, I'll make you dance for this, my friend," I said; and I followed Brigadier Durand across the street to the cottage of the murdered man.

III

They took me at my word and placed a gendarme with a bared sabre at the gateway by the hedge.

"Give me your parole," said poor Durand, "and I will let you go where you wish." But I refused, and began prowling about the cottage looking for clews. I found lots of things that some people would have considered most important, such as ashes from the Red Admiral's pipe, footprints in a dusty vegetable bin, bottles smelling of Pouldu cider, and dust—oh, lots of dust!—but I was not an expert, only a stupid, everyday amateur; so I defaced the footprints with my thick shooting boots, and I declined to examine the pipe ashes through a microscope, although the Red Admiral's microscope stood on the table close at hand.

At last I found what I had been looking for, some long wisps of straw, curiously depressed and flattened in the middle, and I was certain I had found the evidence that would settle Yves Terrec for the rest of his life. It was plain as the nose on your face. The straws were sabot straws, flattened where the foot had pressed them, and sticking straight out where they projected beyond the sabot. Now nobody in St. Gildas used straw in sabots except a fisherman who lived near St. Julien, and the straw in his sabots was ordinary yellow wheat straw! This straw, or rather these straws, were from the stalks of the red wheat which only grows inland, and which, everybody in St. Gildas knew, Yves Terrec wore in his sabots. I was perfectly satisfied; and when, three hours later, a hoarse shouting from the Bannalec Road brought me to the window, I was not surprised to see Yves Terrec, bloody, dishevelled, hatless, with his strong arms bound behind him, walking with bent head between two mounted gendarmes. The crowd around him swelled every minute, crying: "Parricide! parricide! Death to the murderer!" As he passed my window I saw great clots of mud on his dusty sabots, from the heels of which projected wisps of red wheat straw. Then I walked back into the Red Admiral's study, determined to find what the microscope would show on the wheat straws. I examined each one very carefully, and then, my eyes aching, I rested my chin on my hand and leaned back in the chair. I had not been as fortunate as some detectives, for there was no evidence that the straws had ever been used in a sabot at all. Furthermore, directly across the hallway stood a carved Breton chest, and now I noticed for the first time that, from beneath the closed lid, dozens of similar red wheat straws projected, bent exactly as mine were bent by the weight of the lid.

I yawned in disgust. It was apparent that I was not cut out for a detective, and I bitterly pondered over the difference between clews in real life and clews in a detective story. After a while I rose, walked over to the chest and opened the lid. The interior was wadded with the red wheat straws, and on this wadding lay two curious glass jars, two or three small vials, several empty bottles labelled chloroform, a collecting jar of cyanide of potassium, and a book. In a farther corner of the chest were some letters bearing English stamps, and also the torn coverings of two parcels, all from England, and all directed to the Red Admiral under his proper name of "Sieur Louis Jean Terrec, St. Gildas, par Moëlan, Finistère."

All these traps I carried over to the desk, shut the lid of the chest, and sat down to read the letters. They were written in commercial French, evidently by an Englishman.

Freely translated, the contents of the first letter were as follows:

> "LONDON, *June 12, 1894*.
>
> "DEAR MONSIEUR (*sic*): Your kind favour of the 19th inst. received and contents noted. The latest work on the Lepidoptera of England is Blowzer's How to Catch British Butterflies, with notes and tables, and an introduction by Sir Thomas Sniffer. The price of this work (in one volume, calf) is £5 or 125 francs of French money. A post-office order will receive our prompt attention. We beg to remain,
>
> "Yours, etc.,
> "FRADLEY & TOOMER,
> "470 Regent Square, London, S. W."

The next letter was even less interesting. It merely stated that the money had been received and the book would be forwarded. The third engaged my attention, and I shall quote it, the translation being a free one:

> "DEAR SIR: Your letter of the 1st of July was duly received, and we at once referred it to Mr. Fradley himself. Mr. Fradley being much interested in your question, sent your letter to Professor Schweineri, of the Berlin Entomological Society, whose note Blowzer refers to on page 630, in his How to Catch British Butterflies. We have just received an answer from Professor Schweineri, which we translate into French—(see inclosed slip). Professor Schweineri begs to present to you two jars of cythyl, prepared under his own supervision. We forward the same to you. Trusting that you will find everything satisfactory, we remain,
>
> "Yours sincerely,
> "FRADLEY & TOOMER."

The inclosed slip read as follows:

> "Messrs. FRADLEY & TOOMER,
>
> "GENTLEMEN: Cythaline, a complex hydrocarbon, was first used by Professor Schnoot, of Antwerp, a year ago. I discovered an analogous formula about the same time and named it cythyl. I have used it with great success

> everywhere. It is as certain as a magnet. I beg to present you three small jars, and would be pleased to have you forward two of them to your correspondent in St. Gildas with my compliments. Blowzer's quotation of me, on page 630 of his glorious work, How to Catch British Butterflies, is correct.
>
> "Yours, etc.,
>
> "HEINRICH SCHWEINERI,
> P.H.D., D.D., D.S., M.S."

When I had finished this letter I folded it up and put it into my pocket with the others. Then I opened Blowzer's valuable work, How to Catch British Butterflies, and turned to page 630.

Now, although the Red Admiral could only have acquired the book very recently, and although all the other pages were perfectly clean, this particular page was thumbed black, and heavy pencil marks inclosed a paragraph at the bottom of the page. This is the paragraph:

> "Professor Schweineri says: 'Of the two old methods used by collectors for the capture of the swift-winged, high-flying *Apatura Iris,* or Purple Emperor, the first, which was using a long-handled net, proved successful once in a thousand times; and the second, the placing of bait upon the ground, such as decayed meat, dead cats, rats, etc., was not only disagreeable, even for an enthusiastic collector, but also very uncertain. Once in five hundred times would the splendid butterfly leave the tops of his favourite oak trees to circle about the fetid bait offered. I have found cythyl a perfectly sure bait to draw this beautiful butterfly to the ground, where it can be easily captured. An ounce of cythyl placed in a yellow saucer under an oak tree, will draw to it every *Apatura Iris* within a radius of twenty miles. So, if any collector who possesses a little cythyl, even though it be in a sealed bottle in his pocket—if such a collector does not find a single *Apatura Iris* fluttering close about him within an hour, let him be satisfied that the *Apatura Iris* does not inhabit his country.'"

When I had finished reading this note I sat for a long while thinking hard. Then I examined the two jars. They were labelled "*Cythyl.*" One was full, the other *nearly full*. "The rest must be on the corpse of the Red Admiral," I thought, "no matter if it is in a corked bottle—"

I took all the things back to the chest, laid them carefully on the straw, and closed the lid. The gendarme sentinel at the gate saluted me respectfully as I crossed over the Groix Inn. The Inn was surrounded by an excited crowd, and the hallway was choked with gendarmes and peasants. On every side they greeted me cordially, announcing that the real murderer was caught; but I pushed by them without a word and ran upstairs to find Lys. She opened her door when I knocked and threw both arms about my neck. I took her to my breast and kissed her. After a moment I asked her if she would obey me no matter what I commanded, and she said she would with a proud humility that touched me.

"Then go at once to Yvette in St. Julien," I said. "Ask her to harness the dog-cart and drive you to the convent in Quimperlé. Wait for me there. Will you do this without questioning me, my darling?"

She raised her face to mine. "Kiss me," she said innocently; the next moment she had vanished.

I walked deliberately into the Purple Emperor's room and peered into the gauze-covered box which had held the chrysalis of *Apatura Iris.* It was as I expected. The chrysalis was empty and transparent, and a great crack ran down the middle of its back, but, on the netting inside the box, a magnificent butterfly slowly waved its burnished purple wings; for the chrysalis had given up its silent tenant, the butterfly symbol of immortality. Then a great fear fell upon me. I know now that it was the fear of the Black Priest, but neither then nor for years after did I know that the Black Priest had ever lived on earth. As I bent over the box I heard a confused murmur outside of the house which ended in a furious shout of "Parricide!" and I heard the gendarmes ride away behind a wagon which rattled sharply on the flinty highway. I went to the window. In the wagon sat Yves Terrec, bound and wild-eyed, two gendarmes at either side of him, and all around the wagon rode mounted gendarmes whose bared sabres scarcely kept the crowd away.

"Parricide!" they howled. "Let him die!"

I stepped back and opened the gauze-covered box. Very gently but firmly I took the splendid butterfly by its closed fore wings and lifted it unharmed between my thumb and forefinger. Then, holding it concealed behind my back, I went down into the café.

Of all the crowd that had filled it, shouting for the death of Yves Terrec, only three persons remained seated in front of the huge empty fireplace. They were the Brigadier Durand, Max Fortin, the chemist of Quimperlé, and the Purple Emperor. The latter looked abashed when I entered, but I paid no attention to him and walked straight to the chemist.

"Monsieur Fortin," I said, "do you know much about hydrocarbons?"

"They are my specialty," he said astonished.

"Have you ever heard of such a thing as cythyl?"

"Schweineri's cythyl? Oh, yes! We use it in perfumery."

"Good!" I said. "Has it an odour?"

"No—and, yes. One is always aware of its presence, but really nobody can affirm it has an odour. It is curious," he continued, looking at me, "it is very curious you should have asked me that, for all day I have been imagining I detected the presence of cythyl."

"Do you imagine so now?" I asked.

"Yes, more than ever."

I sprang to the front door and tossed out the butterfly. The splendid creature beat the air for a moment, flitted uncertainly hither and thither, and then, to my astonishment, sailed majestically back into the café and alighted on the hearthstone. For a moment I was nonplussed, but when my eyes rested on the Purple Emperor I comprehended in a flash.

"Lift that hearthstone!" I cried to the Brigadier Durand; "pry it up with your scabbard!"

The Purple Emperor suddenly fell forward in his chair, his face ghastly white, his jaw loose with terror.

"What is cythyl?" I shouted, seizing him by the arm; but he plunged heavily from his chair, face downward on the floor, and at the same moment a cry from the chemist made me turn. There stood the Brigadier Durand, one hand supporting the hearthstone, one hand raised in horror. There stood Max Fortin, the chemist, rigid with excitement, and below, in the hollow bed where the hearthstone had rested, lay a crushed mass of bleeding human flesh, from the midst of which stared a cheap glass eye. I seized the Purple Emperor and dragged him to his feet.

"Look!" I cried; "look at your old friend, the Red Admiral!" but he only smiled in a vacant way, and rolled his head muttering: "Bait for butterflies! Cythyl! Oh, no, no, no! You can't do it, Admiral, d'ye see. I alone own the Purple Emperor! I alone am the Purple Emperor!"

And the same carriage that bore me to Quimperlé to claim my bride, carried him to Quimper, gagged and bound, a foaming, howling lunatic.

* * *

This, then, is the story of the Purple Emperor. I might tell you a pleasanter story if I chose; but concerning the fish that I had hold of, whether it was a salmon, a grilse, or a sea-trout, I may not say, because I have promised Lys, and she has promised me, that no power on earth shall wring from our lips the mortifying confession that the fish escaped. ❋

Pompe Funèbre

A wind-swept sky,
The waste of moorland stretching to the west;
The sea, low moaning in a strange unrest—
A seagull's cry.

Washed by the tide,
The rocks lie sullen in the waning light;
The foam breaks in long strips of hungry white,
Dissatisfied.

BATEMAN.

In the days when the keepers of the house shall tremble.

When I first saw the sexton he was standing motionless behind a stone. Presently he moved on again, pausing at times, and turning right and left with that nervous, jerky motion that always chills me.

His path lay across the blighted moss and withered leaves scattered in moist layers along the bank of the little brown stream, and I, wondering what his errand might be, followed, passing silently over the rotting forest mould. Once or twice he heard me, for I saw him stop short, a blot of black and orange in the sombre woods; but he always started on again, hurrying at times as though the dead might grow impatient.

For the sexton that I followed through the November forest was one of those small creatures that God has sent to bury little things that die alone in the world. Undertaker, sexton, mute, and gravedigger in one, this thing, robed in black and orange, buries all things that die unheeded by the world. And so they call it—this little beetle in black and orange—the "sexton."

How he hurried! I looked up into the gray sky where ashen branches, interlaced, swayed in unfelt winds, and I heard the dry leaves rattle in the tree tops, and the thud of acorns on the mould. A sombre bird peered at me from a heap of brush, then ran pattering over the leaves.

The sexton had reached a bit of broken ground, and was scuffling over sticks and gulleys toward a brown tuft of withered grass above. I dared not help him; besides, I could not bring myself to touch him, he was so horribly absorbed in his errand.

I halted for a moment. The eagerness of this live creature to find his dead and handle it; the odour of death and decay in this little forest world, where I had waited for spring when Lys moved among the flowering gorse, singing like a throstle in the wind—all this troubled me, and I lagged behind.

The sexton scrambled over the dead grass, raising his seared eyes at every wave of wind. The wind brought sadness with it, the scent of lifeless trees, the vague rustle of gorse buds, yellow and dry as paper flowers.

Along the stream, rotting water plants, scorched and frost-blighted, lay massed above the mud. I saw their pallid stems swaying like worms in the listless current.

The sexton had reached a mouldering stump, and now he seemed undecided. I sat down on a fallen tree, moist and bleached, that crumbled under my touch, leaving a stale odour in the air. Overhead a crow rose heavily and flapped out into the moorland; the wind rattled the stark blackthorns; a single drop of rain touched my cheek. I looked into the stream for some sign of life; there was nothing, except a shapeless creature that might have been a blindworm, lying belly upward on the mud bottom. I touched it with a stick. It was stiff and dead.

The wind among the sham paperlike gorse buds filled the woods with a silken rustle. I put out my hand and touched a yellow blossom; it felt like an immortelle on a funeral pillow.

The sexton had moved on again; something, perhaps a musty spider's web, had stuck to one leg, and he dragged it as he laboured on through the wood. Some little field mouse torn by weasel or kestrel, some crushed mole, some tiny dead pile of fur or feather, lay not far off, stricken by God or man or brother creature. And the sexton knew it—how, God knows! But he knew it, and hurried on to his tryst with the dead.

His path now lay along the edge of a tidal inlet from the Groix River. I looked down at the gray water through the leafless branches, and I saw a small snake, head raised, swim from a submerged clot of weeds into the shadow of a rock. There was a curlew, too, somewhere in the black swamp, whose dreary, persistent call cursed the silence.

I wondered when the sexton would fly; for he could fly if he chose; it is only when the dead are near, very near, that he creeps. The soiled mess of cobweb still stuck to him, and his progress was impeded by it. Once I saw a small brown and white spider, striped like a zebra, running swiftly in his tracks, but the sexton turned and raised his two clubbed forelegs in a horrid imploring attitude that still had something of menace under it. The spider backed away and sidled under a stone.

When anything that is dying—sick and close to death—falls upon the face of the earth, something moves in the blue above, floating like a moat; then another, then others. These specks that grow out of the fathomless azure vault are jewelled flies. They come to wait for Death.

The sexton also arranges rendezvous with Death, but never waits; Death must arrive the first.

When the heavy clover is ablaze with painted wings, when bees hum and blunder among the white-thorn, or pass by like swift singing bullets, the sexton snaps open his black and orange wings and hums across the clover with the bees. Death in a scented garden, the tokens of the plague on a fair young breast, the gray flag of fear in the face of one who reels into the arms of Destruction, the sexton scrambling in the lap of spring, folding his sleek wings, unfolding them to ape the buzz of bees, passing over sweet clover tops to the putrid flesh that summons him—these things must be and will be to the end.

The sexton was running now—running fast, trailing the cobweb over twigs and mud. The edge of the wood was near, for I could see the winter wheat, like green scenery in a theatre, stretching for miles across the cliffs, crude as painted grass. And as I crept through the brittle forest fringe, I saw a figure lying face downward in the wheat—a girl's slender form, limp, motionless.

The sexton darted under her breast.

Then I threw myself down beside her, crying, "Lys! Lys!" And as I cried, the icy rain burst out across the moors, and the trees dashed their stark limbs together till the whole spectral forest tossed and danced, and the wind roared among the cliffs.

And through the Dance of Death Lys trembled in my arms, and sobbed and clung to me, murmuring that the Purple Emperor was dead; but the wind tore the words from her white lips, and flung them out across the sea, where the winter lightning lashed the stark heights of Groix.

Then the fear of death was stilled in my soul, and I raised her from the ground, holding her close.

And I saw the sexton, just beyond us, hurry across the ground and seek shelter under a little dead skylark, stiff-winged, muddy, lying alone in the rain.

In the storm, above us, a bird hovered singing through the rain. It passed us twice, still singing, and as it passed again we saw the shadow it cast upon the world was whiter than snow. ❋

The Messenger

Little gray messenger,
Robed like painted Death,
Your robe is dust.
Whom do you seek
Among lilies and closed buds
At dusk?

Among lilies and closed buds
At dusk,
Whom do you seek,
Little gray messenger,
Robed in the awful panoply
Of painted Death?

R. W. C.

All-wise,
Hast thou seen all there is to see with thy two eyes?
Dost thou know all there is to know, and so,
Omniscient,
Darest thou still to say thy brother lies?

R. W. C.

I

The bullet entered here," said Max Fortin, and he placed his middle finger over a smooth hole exactly in the centre of the forehead.

I sat down upon a mound of dry seaweed and unslung my fowling piece.

The little chemist cautiously felt the edges of the shot-hole, first with his middle finger, then with his thumb.

"Let me see the skull again," said I.

Max Fortin picked it up from the sod.

"It's like all the others," he observed. I nodded, without offering to take it from him. After a moment he thoughtfully replaced it upon the grass at my feet.

"It's like all the others," he repeated, wiping his glasses on his handkerchief. "I thought you might care to see one of the skulls, so I brought this over from the gravel pit. The men from Bannalec are digging yet. They ought to stop."

"How many skulls are there altogether?" I inquired.

"They found thirty-eight skulls; there are thirty-nine noted in the list. They lie piled up in the gravel pit on the edge of Le Bihan's wheat field. The men are at work yet. Le Bihan is going to stop them."

"Let's go over," said I; and I picked up my gun and started across the cliffs, Fortin on one side, Môme on the other.

"Who has the list?" I asked, lighting my pipe. "You say there is a list?"

"The list was found rolled up in a brass cylinder," said the little chemist. He added: "You should not smoke here. You know that if a single spark drifted into the wheat—"

"Ah, but I have a cover to my pipe," said I, smiling.

Fortin watched me as I closed the pepper-box arrangement over the glowing bowl of the pipe. Then he continued:

"The list was made out on thick yellow paper; the brass tube has preserved it. It is as fresh to-day as it was in 1760. You shall see it."

"Is that the date?"

"The list is dated 'April, 1760.' The Brigadier Durand has it. It is not written in French."

"Not written in French!" I exclaimed.

"No," replied Fortin solemnly, "it is written in Breton."

"But," I protested, "the Breton language was never written or printed in 1760."

"Except by priests," said the chemist.

"I have heard of but one priest who ever wrote the Breton language," I began.

Fortin stole a glance at my face.

"You mean—the Black Priest?" he asked.

I nodded.

Fortin opened his mouth to speak again, hesitated, and finally shut his teeth obstinately over the wheat stem that he was chewing.

"And the Black Priest?" I suggested encouragingly. But I knew it was useless; for it is easier to move the stars from their courses than to make an obstinate Breton talk. We walked on for a minute or two in silence.

"Where is the Brigadier Durand?" I asked, motioning Môme to come out of the wheat, which he was trampling as though it were heather. As I spoke we came in sight of the farther edge of the wheat field and the dark, wet mass of cliffs beyond.

"Durand is down there—you can see him; he stands just behind the Mayor of St. Gildas."

"I see," said I; and we struck straight down, following a sun-baked cattle path across the heather.

When we reached the edge of the wheat field, Le Bihan, the Mayor of St. Gildas, called to me, and I tucked my gun under my arm and skirted the wheat to where he stood.

"Thirty-eight skulls," he said in his thin, high-pitched voice; "there is but one more, and I am opposed to further search. I suppose Fortin told you?"

I shook hands with him, and returned the salute of the Brigadier Durand.

"I am opposed to further search," repeated Le Bihan, nervously picking at the mass of silver buttons which covered the front of his velvet and broadcloth jacket like a breastplate of scale armour.

Durand pursed up his lips, twisted his tremendous mustache, and hooked his thumbs in his sabre belt.

"As for me," he said, "I am in favour of further search."

"Further search for what—for the thirty-ninth skull?" I asked.

Le Bihan nodded. Durand frowned at the sunlit sea, rocking like a bowl of molten gold from the cliffs to the horizon. I followed his eyes. On the dark glistening cliffs, silhouetted against the glare of the sea, sat a cormorant, black, motionless, its horrible head raised toward heaven.

"Where is that list, Durand?" I asked.

The gendarme rummaged in his despatch pouch and produced a brass cylinder about a foot long. Very gravely he unscrewed the head and dumped out a scroll of thick yellow paper closely covered with writing on both sides. At a nod from Le Bihan he handed me the scroll. But I could make nothing of the coarse writing, now faded to a dull brown.

"Come, come, Le Bihan," I said impatiently, "translate it, won't you? You and Max Fortin make a lot of mystery out of nothing, it seems."

Le Bihan went to the edge of the pit where the three Bannalec men were digging, gave an order or two in Breton, and turned to me.

As I came to the edge of the pit the Bannalec men were removing a square piece of sailcloth from what appeared to be a pile of cobblestones.

"Look!" said Le Bihan shrilly. I looked. The pile below was a heap of skulls. After a moment I clambered down the gravel sides of the pit and walked over to the men of Bannalec. They saluted me gravely, leaning on their picks and shovels, and wiping their sweating faces with sunburned hands.

"How many?" said I in Breton.

"Thirty-eight," they replied.

I glanced around. Beyond the heap of skulls lay two piles of human bones. Beside these was a mound of broken, rusted bits of iron and steel. Looking closer, I saw that this mound was composed of rusty bayonets, sabre blades, scythe blades, with here and there a tarnished buckle attached to a bit of leather hard as iron.

I picked up a couple of buttons and a belt plate. The buttons bore the royal arms of England; the belt plate was emblazoned with the English arms, and also with the number "27."

"I have heard my grandfather speak of the terrible English regiment, the 27th Foot, which landed and stormed the fort up there," said one of the Bannalec men.

"Oh!" said I; "then these are the bones of English soldiers?"

"Yes," said the men of Bannalec.

Le Bihan was calling to me from the edge of the pit above, and I handed the belt plate and buttons to the men and climbed the side of the excavation.

"Well," said I, trying to prevent Môme from leaping up and licking my face as I emerged from the pit, "I suppose you know what these bones are. What are you going to do with them?"

"There was a man," said Le Bihan angrily, "an Englishman, who passed here in a dog-cart on his way to Quimper about an hour ago, and what do you suppose he wished to do?"

"Buy the relics?" I asked, smiling.

"Exactly—the pig!" piped the mayor of St. Gildas. "Jean Marie Tregunc, who found the bones, was standing there where Max Fortin stands, and do you know what he answered? He spat upon the ground, and said: 'Pig of an Englishman, do you take me for a desecrator of graves?'"

I knew Tregunc, a sober, blue-eyed Breton, who lived from one year's end to the other without being able to afford a single bit of meat for a meal.

"How much did the Englishman offer Tregunc?" I asked.

"Two hundred francs for the skulls alone."

I thought of the relic hunters and the relic buyers on the battlefields of our civil war.

"Seventeen hundred and sixty is long ago," I said.

"Respect for the dead can never die," said Fortin.

"And the English soldiers came here to kill your fathers and burn your homes," I continued.

"They were murderers and thieves, but—they are dead," said Tregunc, coming up from the beach below, his long sea rake balanced on his dripping jersey.

"How much do you earn every year, Jean Marie?" I asked, turning to shake hands with him.

"Two hundred and twenty francs, monsieur."

"Forty-five dollars a year," I said. "Bah! you are worth more, Jean. Will you take care of my garden for me? My wife wished me to ask you. I think it would be worth one hundred francs a month to you and to me. Come on, Le Bihan—come along, Fortin—and you, Durand. I want somebody to translate that list into French for me."

Tregunc stood gazing at me, his blue eyes dilated.

"You may begin at once," I said, smiling, "If the salary suits you?"

"It suits," said Tregunc, fumbling for his pipe in a silly way that annoyed Le Bihan.

"Then go and begin your work," cried the mayor impatiently; and Tregunc started across the moors toward St. Gildas, taking off his velvet-ribboned cap to me and gripping his sea rake very hard.

"You offer him more than my salary," said the mayor, after a moment's contemplation of his silver buttons.

"Pooh!" said I, "what do you do for your salary except play dominoes with Max Fortin at the Groix Inn?"

Le Bihan turned red, but Durand rattled his sabre and winked at Max Fortin, and I slipped my arm through the arm of the sulky magistrate, laughing.

"There's a shady spot under the cliff," I said; "come on, Le Bihan, and read me what is in the scroll."

In a few moments we reached the shadow of the cliff, and I threw myself upon the turf, chin on hand, to listen.

The gendarme, Durand, also sat down, twisting his mustache into needlelike points. Fortin leaned against the cliff, polishing his glasses and examining us with vague, near-sighted eyes; and Le Bihan, the mayor, planted himself in our midst, rolling up the scroll and tucking it under his arm.

"First of all," he began in a shrill voice, "I am going to light my pipe, and while lighting it I shall tell you what I have heard about the attack on the fort yonder. My father told me; his father told him."

He jerked his head in the direction of the ruined fort, a small, square stone structure on the sea cliff, now nothing but crumbling walls. Then he slowly produced a tobacco pouch, a bit of flint and tinder, and a long-stemmed pipe fitted with a microscopical bowl of baked clay. To fill such a pipe requires ten minutes' close attention. To smoke it to a finish takes but four puffs. It is very Breton, this Breton pipe. It is the crystallization of everything Breton.

"Go on," said I, lighting a cigarette.

"The fort," said the mayor, "was built by Louis XIV, and was dismantled twice by the English. Louis XV restored it in 1739. In 1760 it was carried by assault by the English. They came across from the island of Groix—three shiploads—and they stormed the fort and sacked St. Julien yonder, and they started to burn St. Gildas—you can see the marks of their bullets on my house yet; but the men of Bannalec and the men of Lorient fell upon them with pike and scythe and blunderbuss, and those who did not run away lie there below in the gravel pit now—thirty-eight of them."

"And the thirty-ninth skull?" I asked, finishing my cigarette.

The mayor had succeeded in filling his pipe, and now he began to put his tobacco pouch away.

"The thirty-ninth skull," he mumbled, holding the pipestem between his defective teeth—"the thirty-ninth skull is no business of mine. I have told the Bannalec men to cease digging."

"But what is—whose is the missing skull?" I persisted curiously.

The mayor was busy trying to strike a spark to his tinder. Presently he set it aglow, applied it to his pipe, took the prescribed four puffs, knocked the ashes out of the bowl, and gravely replaced the pipe in his pocket.

"The missing skull?" he asked.

"Yes," said I impatiently.

The mayor slowly unrolled the scroll and began to read, translating from the Breton into French. And this is what he read:

> "'ON THE CLIFFS OF ST. GILDAS,
> "'*April 13, 1760.*
>
> "'On this day, by order of the Count of Soisic, general in chief of the Breton forces now lying in Kerselec Forest, the bodies of thirty-eight English soldiers of the 27th, 50th, and 72d regiments of Foot were buried in this spot, together with their arms and equipments.'"

The mayor paused and glanced at me reflectively.

"Go on, Le Bihan," I said.

> "'With them,'" continued the mayor, turning the scroll and reading on the other side, "'was buried the body of that vile traitor who betrayed the fort to the English. The manner of his death was as follows: By order of the most noble Count of Soisic, the traitor was first branded upon the forehead with the brand of an arrowhead. The iron burned through the flesh, and was pressed heavily so that the brand should even burn into the bone of the skull. The traitor was then led out and bidden to kneel. He admitted having guided the English from the island of Groix. Although a priest and a Frenchman, he had violated his priestly office to aid him in discovering the password to the fort. This password he extorted during confession from a young Breton girl who was in the habit of rowing across from the island of Groix to visit her husband in the fort. When the fort fell, this young girl, crazed by the death of her husband, sought the Count of Soisic and told how the priest had forced her to confess to him all she knew about the fort. The priest was arrested at St. Gildas as he was about to cross the river to Lorient. When arrested he cursed the girl, Marie Trevec—'"

"What!" I exclaimed, "Marie Trevec!"

> "'Marie Trevec,'" repeated Le Bihan; "'the priest cursed Marie Trevec, and all her family and descendants. He was shot as he knelt, having a mask of leather over his face, because the Bretons who composed the squad of execution refused to fire at a priest unless his face was concealed. The priest was l'Abbé Sorgue, commonly known as the Black Priest on account of his dark face and swarthy eyebrows. He was buried with a stake through his heart.'"

Le Bihan paused, hesitated, looked at me, and handed the manuscript back to Durand. The gendarme took it and slipped it into the brass cylinder.

"So," said I, "the thirty-ninth skull is the skull of the Black Priest."

"Yes," said Fortin. "I hope they won't find it."

"I have forbidden them to proceed," said the mayor querulously. "You heard me, Max Fortin."

I rose and picked up my gun. Môme came and pushed his head into my hand.

"That's a fine dog," observed Durand, also rising.

"Why don't you wish to find his skull?" I asked Le Bihan. "It would be curious to see whether the arrow brand really burned into the bone."

"There is something in that scroll that I didn't read to you," said the mayor grimly. "Do you wish to know what it is?"

"Of course," I replied in surprise.

"Give me the scroll again, Durand," he said; then he read from the bottom:

> "'I, l'Abbé Sorgue, forced to write the above by my executioners, have written it in my own blood; and with it I leave my curse. My curse on St. Gildas, on Marie Trevec, and on her descendants. I will come back to St. Gildas when my remains are disturbed. Woe to that Englishman whom my branded skull shall touch!'"

"What rot!" I said. "Do you believe it was really written in his own blood?"

"I am going to test it," said Fortin, "at the request of Monsieur le Maire. I am not anxious for the job, however."

"See," said Le Bihan, holding out the scroll to me, "it is signed, 'l'Abbé Sorgue.'"

I glanced curiously over the paper.

"It must be the Black Priest," I said. "He was the only man who wrote in the Breton language. This is a wonderfully interesting discovery, for now, at last, the mystery of the Black Priest's disappearance is cleared up. You will, of course, send this scroll to Paris, Le Bihan?"

"No," said the mayor obstinately, "it shall be buried in the pit below where the rest of the Black Priest lies."

I looked at him and recognised that argument would be useless. But still I said, "It will be a loss to history, Monsieur Le Bihan."

"All the worse for history, then," said the enlightened mayor of St. Gildas.

We had sauntered back to the gravel pit while speaking. The men of Bannalec were carrying the bones of the English soldiers toward the St. Gildas cemetery, on the cliffs to the east, where already a knot of white-coiffed women stood in attitudes of prayer; and I saw the sombre robe of a priest among the crosses of the little graveyard.

"They were thieves and assassins; they are dead now," muttered Max Fortin.

"Respect the dead," repeated the Mayor of St. Gildas, looking after the Bannalec men.

"It was written in that scroll that Marie Trevec, of Groix Island, was cursed by the priest—she and her descendants," I said, touching Le Bihan on the arm. "There was a Marie Trevec who married an Yves Trevec of St. Gildas—"

"It is the same," said Le Bihan, looking at me obliquely.

"Oh!" said I; "then they were ancestors of my wife."

"Do you fear the curse?" asked Le Bihan.

"What?" I laughed.

"There was the case of the Purple Emperor," said Max Fortin timidly.

Startled for a moment, I faced him, then shrugged my shoulders and kicked at a smooth bit of rock which lay near the edge of the pit, almost embedded in gravel.

"Do you suppose the Purple Emperor drank himself crazy because he was descended from Marie Trevec?" I asked contemptuously.

"Of course not," said Max Fortin hastily.

"Of course not," piped the mayor. "I only— Hello! what's that you're kicking?"

"What?" said I, glancing down, at the same time involuntarily giving another kick. The smooth bit of rock dislodged itself and rolled out of the loosened gravel at my feet.

"The thirty-ninth skull!" I exclaimed. "By jingo, it's the noddle of the Black Priest! See! there is the arrowhead branded on the front!"

The mayor stepped back. Max Fortin also retreated. There was a pause, during which I looked at them, and they looked anywhere but at me.

"I don't like it," said the mayor at last, in a husky, high voice. "I don't like it! The scroll says he will come back to St. Gildas when his remains are disturbed. I—I don't like it, Monsieur Darrel—"

"Bosh!" said I; "the poor wicked devil is where he can't get out. For Heaven's sake, Le Bihan, what is this stuff you are talking in the year of grace 1896?"

The mayor gave me a look.

"And he says 'Englishman.' You are an Englishman, Monsieur Darrel," he announced.

"You know better. You know I'm an American."

"It's all the same," said the Mayor of St. Gildas, obstinately.

"No, it isn't!" I answered, much exasperated, and deliberately pushed the skull till it rolled into the bottom of the gravel pit below.

"Cover it up," said I; "bury the scroll with it too, if you insist, but I think you ought to send it to Paris. Don't look so gloomy, Fortin, unless you believe in were-wolves and ghosts. Hey! what the—what the devil's the matter with you, anyway? What are you staring at, Le Bihan?"

"Come, come," muttered the mayor in a low, tremulous voice, "it's time we got out of this. Did you see? Did you see, Fortin?"

"I saw," whispered Max Fortin, pallid with fright.

The two men were almost running across the sunny pasture now, and I hastened after them, demanding to know what was the matter.

"Matter!" chattered the mayor, gasping with exasperation and terror. "The skull is rolling uphill again!" and he burst into a terrified gallop. Max Fortin followed close behind.

I watched them stampeding across the pasture, then turned toward the gravel pit, mystified, incredulous. The skull was lying on the edge of the pit, exactly where it had been before I pushed it over the edge. For a second I stared at it; a singular chilly feeling crept up my spinal column, and I turned and walked away, sweat starting from the root of every hair on my head. Before I had gone twenty paces the absurdity of the whole thing struck me. I halted, hot with shame and annoyance, and retraced my steps.

There lay the skull.

"I rolled a stone down instead of the skull," I muttered to myself. Then with the butt of my gun I pushed the skull over the edge of the pit and watched it roll to the bottom; and as it struck the bottom of the pit, Môme, my dog, suddenly whipped his tail between his legs, whimpered, and made off across the moor.

"Môme!" I shouted, angry and astonished; but the dog only fled the faster, and I ceased calling from sheer surprise.

"What the mischief is the matter with that dog!" I thought. He had never before played me such a trick.

Mechanically I glanced into the pit, but I could not see the skull. I looked down. The skull lay at my feet again, touching them.

"Good heavens!" I stammered, and struck at it blindly with my gunstock. The ghastly thing flew into the air, whirling over and over, and rolled again down the sides of the pit to the bottom. Breathlessly I stared at it, then, confused and scarcely comprehending, I stepped back from the pit, still facing it, one, ten, twenty paces, my eyes almost starting from my head, as though I expected to see the thing roll up from the bottom of the pit under my very gaze. At last I turned my back to the pit and strode out across the gorse-covered moorland toward my home. As I reached the road that winds from St. Gildas to St. Julien I gave one last hasty glance at the pit over my shoulder. The sun shone hot on the sod about the excavation. There was something white and bare and round on the turf at the edge of the pit. It might have been a stone; there were plenty of them lying about.

II

When I entered my garden I saw Môme sprawling on the stone doorstep. He eyed me sideways and flopped his tail.

"Are you not mortified, you idiot dog?" I said, looking about the upper windows for Lys.

Môme rolled over on his back and raised one deprecating forepaw, as though to ward off calamity.

"Don't act as though I was in the habit of beating you to death," I said, disgusted. I had never in my life raised whip to the brute. "But you are a fool dog," I continued. "No, you needn't come to be babied and wept over; Lys can do that, if she insists, but I am ashamed of you, and you can go the devil."

Môme slunk off into the house, and I followed, mounting directly to my wife's boudoir. It was empty.

"Where has she gone?" I said, looking hard at Môme, who had followed me. "Oh! I see you don't know. Don't pretend you do. Come off that lounge! Do you think Lys wants tan-coloured hairs all over her lounge?"

I rang the bell for Catherine and 'Fine, but they didn't know where "madame" had gone; so I went into my room, bathed, exchanged my somewhat grimy shooting clothes for a suit of warm, soft knickerbockers, and, after lingering some extra moments over my toilet—for I was particular, now that I had married Lys—I went down to the garden and took a chair out under the fig-trees.

"Where can she be?" I wondered. Môme came sneaking out to be comforted, and I forgave him for Lys's sake, whereupon he frisked.

"You bounding cur," said I, "now what on earth started you off across the moor? If you do it again I'll push you along with a charge of dust shot."

As yet I had scarcely dared think about the ghastly hallucination of which I had been a victim, but now I faced it squarely, flushing a little with mortification at the thought of my hasty retreat from the gravel pit.

"To think," I said aloud, "that those old woman's tales of Max Fortin and Le Bihan should have actually made me see what didn't exist at all! I lost my nerve like a schoolboy in a dark bedroom." For I knew now that I had mistaken a round stone for a skull each time, and had pushed a couple of big pebbles into the pit instead of the skull itself.

"By jingo!" said I, "I'm nervous; my liver must be in a devil of a condition if I see such things when I'm awake! Lys will know what to give me."

I felt mortified and irritated and sulky, and thought disgustedly of Le Bihan and Max Fortin.

But after a while I ceased speculating, dismissed the mayor, the chemist, and the skull from my mind, and smoked pensively, watching the sun low dipping in the western ocean. As the twilight fell for a moment over ocean and moorland, a wistful, restless happiness filled my heart, the happiness that all men know—all men who have loved.

Slowly the purple mist crept out over the sea; the cliffs darkened; the forest was shrouded.

Suddenly the sky above burned with the afterglow, and the world was alight again.

Cloud after cloud caught the rose dye; the cliffs were tinted with it; moor and pasture, heather and forest burned and pulsated with the gentle flush. I saw the gulls turning and tossing above the sand bar, their snowy wings tipped with pink; I saw the sea swallows sheering the surface of the still river, stained to its placid depths with warm reflections of the clouds. The twitter of drowsy hedge birds broke out in the stillness; a salmon rolled its shining side above tide-water.

The interminable monotone of the ocean intensified the silence. I sat motionless, holding my breath as one who listens to the first low rumour of an organ. All at once the pure whistle of a nightingale cut the silence, and the first moonbeam silvered the wastes of mist-hung waters.

I raised my head.

Lys stood before me in the garden.

When we had kissed each other, we linked arms and moved up and down the gravel walks, watching the moonbeams sparkle on the sand bar as the tide ebbed and ebbed. The broad beds of white pinks about us were atremble with hovering white moths; the October roses hung all abloom, perfuming the salt wind.

"Sweetheart," I said, "where is Yvonne? Has she promised to spend Christmas with us?"

"Yes, Dick; she drove me down from Plougat this afternoon. She sent her love to you. I am not jealous. What did you shoot?"

"A hare and four partridges. They are in the gun room. I told Catherine not to touch them until you had seen them."

Now I suppose I knew that Lys could not be particularly enthusiastic over game or guns; but she pretended she was, and always scornfully denied that it was for my sake and not for the pure love of sport. So she dragged me off to inspect the rather meagre game bag, and she paid me pretty compliments and gave a little cry of delight and pity as I lifted the enormous hare out of the sack by his ears.

"He'll eat no more of our lettuce," I said, attempting to justify the assassination.

"Unhappy little bunny—and what a beauty! O Dick, you are a splendid shot, are you not?"

I evaded the question and hauled out a partridge.

"Poor little dead things!" said Lys in a whisper; "it seems a pity—doesn't it, Dick? But then you are so clever—"

"We'll have them broiled," I said guardedly; "tell Catherine."

Catherine came in to take away the game, and presently 'Fine Lelocard, Lys's maid, announced dinner, and Lys tripped away to her boudoir.

I stood an instant contemplating her blissfully, thinking, "My boy, you're the happiest fellow in the world—you're in love with your wife!"

I walked into the dining room, beamed at the plates, walked out again; met Tregunc in the hallway, beamed on him; glanced into the kitchen, beamed at Catherine, and went up stairs, still beaming.

Before I could knock at Lys's door it opened, and Lys came hastily out. When she saw me she gave a little cry of relief, and nestled close to my breast.

"There is something peering in at my window," she said.

"What!" I cried angrily.

"A man, I think, disguised as a priest, and he has a mask on. He must have climbed up by the bay tree."

I was down the stairs and out of doors in no time. The moonlit garden was absolutely deserted. Tregunc came up, and together we searched the hedge and shrubbery around the house and out to the road.

"Jean Marie," said I at length, "loose my bulldog—he knows you—and take your supper on the porch where you can watch. My wife says the fellow is disguised as a priest, and wears a mask."

Tregunc showed his white teeth in a smile. "He will not care to venture in here again, I think, Monsieur Darrel."

I went back and found Lys seated quietly at the table.

"The soup is ready, dear," she said. "Don't worry; it was only some foolish lout from Bannalec. No one in St. Gildas or St. Julien would do such a thing."

I was too much exasperated to reply at first, but Lys treated it as a stupid joke, and after a while I began to look at it in that light.

Lys told me about Yvonne, and reminded me of my promise to have Herbert Stuart down to meet her.

"You wicked diplomat!" I protested. "Herbert is in Paris, and hard at work for the Salon."

"Don't you think he might spare a week to flirt with the prettiest girl in Finistère?" inquired Lys innocently.

"Prettiest girl! Not much!" I said.

"Who is, then?" urged Lys.

I laughed a trifle sheepishly.

"I suppose you mean me, Dick," said Lys, colouring up.

"Now I bore you, don't I?"

"Bore me? Ah, no, Dick."

After coffee and cigarettes were served I spoke about Tregunc, and Lys approved.

"Poor Jean! he will be glad, won't he? What a dear fellow you are!"

"Nonsense," said I; "we need a gardener; you said so yourself, Lys."

But Lys leaned over and kissed me, and then bent down and hugged Môme, who whistled through his nose in sentimental appreciation.

"I am a very happy woman," said Lys.

"Môme was a very bad dog to-day," I observed.

"Poor Môme!" said Lys, smiling.

When dinner was over and Môme lay snoring before the blaze—for the October nights are often chilly in Finistère—Lys curled up in the chimney corner with her embroidery, and gave me a swift glance from under her drooping lashes.

"You look like a schoolgirl, Lys," I said teasingly. "I don't believe you are sixteen yet."

She pushed back her heavy burnished hair thoughtfully. Her wrist was as white as surf foam.

"Have we been married four years? I don't believe it," I said.

She gave me another swift glance and touched the embroidery on her knee, smiling faintly.

"I see," said I, also smiling at the embroidered garment. "Do you think it will fit?"

"Fit?" repeated Lys. Then she laughed.

"And," I persisted, "are you perfectly sure that you—er—we shall need it?"

"Perfectly," said Lys. A delicate colour touched her cheeks and neck. She held up the little garment, all fluffy with misty lace and wrought with quaint embroidery.

"It is very gorgeous," said I; "don't use your eyes too much, dearest. May I smoke a pipe?"

"Of course," she said, selecting a skein of pale blue silk.

For a while I sat and smoked in silence, watching her slender fingers among the tinted silks and thread of gold.

Presently she spoke: "What did you say your crest is, Dick?"

"My crest? Oh, something or other rampant on a something or other—"

"Dick!"

"Dearest?"

"Don't be flippant."

"But I really forget. It's an ordinary crest; everybody in New York has them. No family should be without 'em."

"You are disagreeable, Dick. Send Josephine upstairs for my album."

"Are you going to put that crest on the—the—whatever it is?"

"I am; and my own crest, too."

I thought of the Purple Emperor and wondered a little.

"You didn't know I had one, did you?" she smiled.

"What is it?" I replied evasively.

"You shall see. Ring for Josephine."

I rang, and, when 'Fine appeared, Lys gave her some orders in a low voice, and Josephine trotted away, bobbing her white-coiffed head with a "Bien, madame!"

After a few minutes she returned, bearing a tattered, musty volume, from which the gold and blue had mostly disappeared.

I took the book in my hands and examined the ancient emblazoned covers.

"Lilies!" I exclaimed.

"Fleur-de-lis," said my wife demurely.

"Oh!" said I, astonished, and opened the book.

"You have never before seen this book?" asked Lys, with a touch of malice in her eyes.

"You know I haven't. Hello! what's this? Oho! So there should be a *de* before Trevec? Lys de Trevec? Then why in the world did the Purple Emperor—"

"Dick!" cried Lys.

"All right," said I. "Shall I read about the Sieur de Trevec who rode to Saladin's tent alone to seek for medicine for St. Louis? or shall I read about—what is it? Oh, here it is, all down in black and white—about the Marquis de Trevec who drowned himself before Alva's eyes rather than sur-render the banner of the fleur-de-lis to Spain? It's all written here. But, dear, how about that soldier named Trevec who was killed in the old fort on the cliff yonder?"

"He dropped the *de,* and the Trevecs since then have been Republicans," said Lys—"all except me."

"That's quite right," said I; "it is time that we Republicans should agree upon some feudal system. My dear, I drink to the king!" and I raised my wine-glass and looked at Lys.

"To the king," said Lys, flushing. She smoothed out the tiny garment on her knees; she touched the glass with her lips; her eyes were very sweet. I drained the glass to the king.

After a silence I said: "I will tell the king stories. His Majesty shall be amused."

"His Majesty," repeated Lys softly.

"Or hers," I laughed. "Who knows?"

"Who knows?" murmured Lys, with a gentle sigh.

"I know some stores about Jack the Giant-Killer," I announced. "Do you, Lys?"

"I? No, not about a giant-killer, but I know all about the were-wolf, and Jeanne-la-Flamme, and the Man in Purple Tatters, and—O dear me! I know lots more."

"You are very wise," said I. "I shall teach his Majesty English."

"And I Breton," cried Lys jealously.

"I shall bring playthings to the king," said I—"big green lizards from the gorse, little gray mullets to swim in glass globes, baby rabbits from the forest of Kerselec—"

"And I," said Lys, "will bring the first primrose, the first branch of aubepine, the first jonquil, to the king—my king."

"Our king," said I; and there was peace in Finistère.

I lay back, idly turning the leaves of the curious old volume.

"I am looking," said I, "for the crest."

"The crest, dear? It is a priest's head with an arrow-shaped mark on the forehead, on a field—"

I sat up and stared at my wife.

"Dick, whatever is the matter?" she smiled. "The story is there in that book. Do you care to read it? No? Shall I tell it to you? Well, then: It happened in the third crusade. There was a monk whom men called the Black Priest. He turned apostate, and sold himself to the enemies of Christ. A Sieur de Trevec burst into the Saracen camp, at the head of only one hundred lances, and carried the Black Priest away out of the very midst of their army."

"So that is how you come by the crest," I said quietly; but I thought of the branded skull in the gravel pit, and wondered.

"Yes," said Lys. "The Sieur de Trevec cut the Black Priest's head off, but first he branded him with an arrow mark on the forehead. The book says it was a pious action, and that the Sieur de Trevec got great merit by it. But I think it was cruel, the branding," she sighed.

"Did you ever hear of any other Black Priest?"

"Yes. There was one in the last century, here in St. Gildas. He cast a white shadow in the sun. He wrote in the Breton language. Chronicles, too, I believe. I never saw them. His name was the same as that of the old chronicler, and of the other priest, Jacques Sorgue. Some said he was a lineal descendant of the traitor. Of course the first Black Priest was bad enough for anything. But if he did have a child, it need not have been the ancestor of the last Jacques Sorgue. They say this one was a holy man. They say he was so good he was not allowed to die, but was caught up to heaven one day," added Lys, with believing eyes.

I smiled.

"But he disappeared," persisted Lys.

"I'm afraid his journey was in another direction," I said jestingly, and thoughtlessly told her the story of the morning. I had utterly forgotten the masked man at her window, but before I finished I remembered him fast enough, and realized what I had done as I saw her face whiten.

"Lys," I urged tenderly, "that was only some clumsy clown's trick. You said so yourself. You are not superstitious, my dear?"

Her eyes were on mine. She slowly drew the little gold cross from her bosom and kissed it. But her lips trembled as they pressed the symbol of faith.

III

About nine o'clock the next morning I walked into the Groix Inn and sat down at the long discoloured oaken table, nodding good-day to Marianne Bruyère , who in turn bobbed her white coiffe at me.

"My clever Bannalec maid," said I, "what is good for a stirrup-cup at the Groix Inn?"

"Schist?" she inquired in Breton.

"With a dash of red wine, then," I replied.

She brought the delicious Quimperlé cider, and I poured a little Bordeaux into it. Marianne watched me with laughing black eyes.

"What makes your cheeks so red, Marianne?" I asked. "Has Jean Marie been here?"

"We are to be married, Monsieur Darrel," she laughed.

"Ah! Since when has Jean Marie Tregunc lost his head?"

"His head? Oh, Monsieur Darrel—his heart, you mean!"

"So I do," said I. "Jean Marie is a practical fellow."

"It is all due to your kindness—" began the girl, but I raised my hand and held up the glass.

"It's due to himself. To your happiness, Marianne," and I took a hearty draught of the schist. "Now," said I, "tell me where I can find Le Bihan and Max Fortin."

"Monsieur Le Bihan and Monsieur Fortin are above in the broad room. I believe they are examining the Red Admiral's effects."

"To send them to Paris? Oh, I know. May I go up, Marianne?"

"And God go with you," smiled the girl.

When I knocked at the door of the broad room above little Max Fortin opened it. Dust covered his spectacles and nose; his hat, with the tiny velvet ribbons fluttering, was all awry.

"Come in, Monsieur Darrel," he said; "the mayor and I are packing up the effects of the Purple Emperor and of the poor Red Admiral."

"The collections?" I asked, entering the room. "You must be very careful in packing those butterfly cases; the slightest jar might break wings and antennae, you know."

Le Bihan shook hands with me and pointed to the great pile of boxes.

"They're all cork lined," he said, "but Fortin and I are putting felt around each box. The Entomological Society of Paris pays the freight."

The combined collections of the Red Admiral and the Purple Emperor made a magnificent display.

I lifted and inspected case after case set with gorgeous butterflies and moths, each specimen carefully labelled with the name in Latin. There were cases filled with crimson tiger moths all aflame with colour; cases devoted to the common yellow butterflies; symphonies in orange and pale yellow; cases of soft gray and dun-coloured sphinx moths; and cases of garish nettle-bred butterflies of the numerous family of *Vanessa*.

All alone in a great case by itself was pinned the purple emperor, the *Apatura Iris*, that fatal specimen that had given the Purple Emperor his name and quietus.

I remembered the butterfly, and stood looking at it with bent eyebrows.

Le Bihan glanced up from the floor where he was nailing down the lid of a box full of cases.

"It is settled, then," said he, "that madame, your wife, gives the Purple Emperor's entire collection to the city of Paris?"

I nodded.

"Without accepting anything for it?"

"It is a gift," I said.

"Including the purple emperor there in the case? That butterfly is worth a great deal of money," persisted Le Bihan.

"You don't suppose that we would wish to sell that specimen, do you?" I answered a trifle sharply.

"If I were you I should destroy it," said the mayor in his high-pitched voice.

"That would be nonsense," said I—"like your burying the brass cylinder and scroll yesterday."

"It was not nonsense," said Le Bihan doggedly, "and I should prefer not to discuss the subject of the scroll."

I looked at Max Fortin, who immediately avoided my eyes.

"You are a pair of superstitious old women," said I, digging my hands into my pockets; "you swallow every nursery tale that is invented."

"What of it?" said Le Bihan sulkily; "there's more truth than lies in most of 'em."

"Oh!" I sneered, "does the Mayor of St. Gildas and St. Julien believe in the Loup-garou?"

"No, not in the Loup-garou."

"In what, then—Jeanne-la-Flamme?"

"That," said Le Bihan with conviction, "is history."

"The devil it is!" said I; "and perhaps, monsieur the mayor, your faith in giants is unimpaired?"

"There were giants—everybody knows it," growled Max Fortin.

"And you a chemist!" I observed scornfully.

"Listen, Monsieur Darrel," squeaked Le Bihan; "you know yourself that the Purple Emperor was a scientific man. Now suppose I should tell you that he always refused to include in his collection a Death's Messenger?"

"A what?" I exclaimed.

"You know what I mean—that moth that flies by night; some call it the Death's Head, but in St. Gildas we call it 'Death's Messenger.'"

"Oh!" said I, "you mean that big sphinx moth that is commonly known as the 'death's-head moth.' Why the mischief should the people here call it death's messenger?"

"For hundreds of years it has been known as death's messenger in St. Gildas," said Max Fortin. "Even Froissart speaks of it in his commentaries on Jacques Sorgue's Chronicles. The book is in your library."

"Sorgue? And who was Jacques Sorgue? I never read his book."

"Jacques Sorgue was the son of some unfrocked priest—I forget. It was during the crusades."

"Good Heavens!" I burst out, "I've been hearing of nothing but crusades and priests and death and sorcery ever since I kicked that skull into the gravel pit, and I am tired of it, I tell you frankly. One would think we lived in the dark ages. Do you know what year of our Lord it is, Le Bihan?"

"Eighteen hundred and ninety-six," replied the mayor.

"And yet you two hulking men are afraid of a death's-head moth."

"I don't care to have one fly into the window," said Max Fortin; "it means evil to the house and the people in it."

"God alone knows why he marked one of his creatures with a yellow death's head on the back," observed Le Bihan piously, "but I take it that he meant it as a warning; and I propose to profit by it," he added triumphantly.

"See here, Le Bihan," I said; "by a stretch of imagination one can make out a skull on the thorax of a certain big sphinx moth. What of it?"

"It is a bad thing to touch," said the mayor, wagging his head.

"It squeaks when handled," added Max Fortin.

"Some creatures squeak all the time," I observed, looking hard at Le Bihan.

"Pigs," added the mayor.

"Yes, and asses," I replied. "Listen, Le Bihan: do you mean to tell me that you saw that skull roll uphill yesterday?"

The mayor shut his mouth tightly and picked up his hammer.

"Don't be obstinate," I said; "I asked you a question."

"And I refuse to answer," snapped Le Bihan. "Fortin saw what I saw; let him talk about it."

I looked searchingly at the little chemist.

"I don't say that I saw it actually roll up out of the pit, all by itself," said Fortin with a shiver, "but—but then, how did it come up out of the pit, if it didn't roll up all by itself?"

"It didn't come up at all; that was a yellow cobblestone that you mistook for the skull again," I replied. "You were nervous, Max."

"A—a very curious cobblestone, Monsieur Darrel," said Fortin.

"I also was a victim to the same hallucination," I continued, "and I regret to say that I took the trouble to roll two innocent cobblestones into the gravel pit, imagining each time that it was the skull I was rolling."

"It was," observed Le Bihan with a morose shrug.

"It just shows," said I, ignoring the mayor's remark, "how easy it is to fix up a train of coincidences so that the result seems to savour of the supernatural. Now, last night my wife imagined that she saw a priest in a mask peer in at her window—"

Fortin and Le Bihan scrambled hastily from their knees, dropping hammer and nails.

"W-h-a-t—what's that?" demanded the mayor.

I repeated what I had said. Max Fortin turned livid.

"My God!" muttered Le Bihan, "the Black Priest is in St. Gildas!"

"D-don't you—you know the old prophecy?" stammered Fortin; "Froissart quotes it from Jacques Sorgue:

'When the Black Priest rises from the dead,
St. Gildas folk shall shriek in bed;
When the Black Priest rises from his grave,
May the good God St. Gildas save!'"

"Aristide Le Bihan," I said angrily, "and you, Max Fortin, I've got enough of this nonsense! Some foolish lout from Bannalec has been in St. Gildas playing tricks to frighten old fools like you. If you have nothing better to talk about than nursery legends I'll wait until you come to your senses. Good-morning." And I walked out, more disturbed than I cared to acknowledge to myself.

The day had become misty and overcast. Heavy, wet clouds hung in the east. I heard the surf thundering against the cliffs, and the gray gulls squealed as they tossed and turned high in the sky. The tide was creeping across the river sands, higher, higher, and I saw the seaweed floating on the beach, and the *lançons* springing from the foam, silvery threadlike flashes in the gloom. Curlew were flying up the river in twos and threes; the timid sea swallows skimmed across the moors toward some quiet, lonely pool, safe from the coming tempest. In every hedge field birds were gathering, huddling together, twittering restlessly.

When I reached the cliffs I sat down, resting my chin on my clenched hands. Already a vast curtain of rain, sweeping across the ocean miles away, hid the island of Groix. To the east, behind the white semaphore on the hills, black clouds crowded up over the horizon. After a little the thunder boomed, dull, distant, and slender skeins of lightning unravelled across the crest of the coming storm. Under the cliff at my feet the surf rushed foaming over the shore, and the *lançons* jumped and skipped and quivered until they seemed to be but the reflections of the meshed lightning.

I turned to the east. It was raining over Groix, it was raining at Sainte Barbe, it was raining now at the semaphore. High in the storm whirl a few gulls pitched; a nearer cloud trailed veils of rain in its wake; the sky was spattered with lightning; the thunder boomed.

As I rose to go, a cold raindrop fell upon the back of my hand, and another, and yet another on my face. I gave a last glance at the sea, where the waves were bursting into strange white shapes that seemed to fling out menacing arms toward me. Then something moved on the cliff, something black as the black rock it clutched—a filthy cormorant, craning its hideous head at the sky.

Slowly I plodded homeward across the sombre moorland, where the gorse stems glimmered with a dull metallic green, and the heather, no longer violet and purple, hung drenched and dun-coloured among the dreary rocks. The wet turf creaked under my heavy boots, the black-thorn scraped and grated against knee and elbow. Over all lay a strange light, pallid, ghastly, where the sea spray whirled across the landscape and drove into my face until it grew numb with the cold. In broad bands, rank after rank, billow on billow, the rain burst out across the endless moors, and yet there was no wind to drive it at such a pace.

Lys stood at the door as I turned into the garden, motioning me to hasten; and then for the first time I became conscious that I was soaked to the skin.

"How ever in the world did you come to stay out when such a storm threatened?" she said. "Oh, you are dripping! Go quickly and change; I have laid your warm underwear on the bed, Dick."

I kissed my wife, and went upstairs to change my dripping clothes for something more comfortable.

When I returned to the morning room there was a driftwood fire on the hearth, and Lys sat in the chimney corner embroidering.

"Catherine tells me that the fishing fleet from Lorient is out. Do you think they are in danger, dear?" asked Lys, raising her blue eyes to mine as I entered.

"There is no wind, and there will be no sea," said I, looking out of the window. Far across the moor I could see the black cliffs looming in the mist.

"How it rains!" murmured Lys; "come to the fire, Dick."

I threw myself on the fur rug, my hands in my pockets, my head on Lys's knees.

"Tell me a story," I said. "I feel like a boy of ten."

Lys raised a finger to her scarlet lips. I always waited for her to do that.

"Will you be very still, then?" she said.

"Still as death."

"Death," echoed a voice, very softly.

"Did you speak, Lys?" I asked, turning so that I could see her face.

"No; did you, Dick?"

"Who said 'death'?' I asked, startled.

"Death," echoed a voice, softly.

I sprang up and looked about. Lys rose too, her needles and embroidery falling to the floor. She seemed about to faint, leaning heavily on me, and I led her to the window and opened it a little way to give her air. As I did so the chain lightning split the zenith, the thunder crashed, and a sheet of rain swept into the room, driving with it something that fluttered—something that flapped, and squeaked, and beat upon the rug with soft, moist wings.

We bent over it together, Lys clinging to me, and we saw that it was a death's-head moth drenched with rain.

The dark day passed slowly as we sat beside the fire, hand in hand, her head against my breast, speaking of sorrow and mystery and death. For Lys believed that there were things on earth that none might understand, things that must be nameless forever and ever, until God rolls up the scroll of life and all is ended. We spoke of hope and fear and faith, and the mystery of the saints; we spoke of the beginning and the end, of the shadow of sin, of omens, and of love. The moth still lay on the floor, quivering its sombre wings in the warmth of the fire, the skull and ribs clearly etched upon its neck and body.

"If it is a messenger of death to this house," I said, "why should we fear, Lys?"

"Death should be welcome to those who love God," murmured Lys, and she drew the cross from her breast and kissed it.

"The moth might die if I threw it out into the storm," I said after a silence.

"Let it remain," sighed Lys.

Late that night my wife lay sleeping, and I sat beside her bed and read in the Chronicle of Jacques Sorgue. I shaded the candle, but Lys grew restless, and finally I took the book down into the morning room, where the ashes of the fire rustled and whitened on the hearth.

The death's-head moth lay on the rug before the fire where I had left it. At first I thought it was dead, but, when I looked closer I saw a lambent fire in its amber eyes. The straight white shadow it cast across the floor wavered as the candle flickered.

The pages of the Chronicle of Jacques Sorgue were damp and sticky; the illuminated gold and blue initials left flakes of azure and gilt where my hand brushed them.

"It is not paper at all; it is thin parchment," I said to myself; and I held the discoloured page close to the candle flame and read, translating laboriously:

> "I, Jacques Sorgue, saw all these things. And I saw the Black Mass celebrated in the chapel of St. Gildas-on-the-Cliff. And it was said by the Abbé Sorgue, my kinsman: for which deadly sin the apostate priest was seized by the most noble Marquis of Plougastel and by him condemned to be burned with hot irons, until his seared soul quit its body and fly to its master the devil. But when the Black Priest lay in the crypt of Plougastel, his master Satan came at night and set him free, and carried him across land and sea to Mahmoud, which is Soldan or Saladin. And I, Jacques Sorgue, travelling afterward by sea, beheld with my own eyes my kinsman, the Black Priest of St. Gildas, borne along in the air upon a vast

> black wing, which was the wing of his master Satan. And this was seen also by two men of the crew."

I turned the page. The wings of the moth on the floor began to quiver. I read on and on, my eyes blurring under the shifting candle flame. I read of battles and of saints, and I learned how the great Soldan made his pact with Satan, and then I came to the Sieur de Trevec, and read how he seized the Black Priest in the midst of Saladin's tents and carried him away and cut off his head, first branding him on the forehead. "And before he suffered," said the Chronicle, "he cursed the Sieur de Trevec and his descendants, and he said he would surely return to St. Gildas. 'For the violence you do to me, I will do violence to you. For the evil I suffer at your hands, I will work evil on you and your descendants. Woe to your children, Sieur de Trevec!'" There was a whirr, a beating of strong wings, and my candle flashed up as in a sudden breeze. A humming filled the room; the great moth darted hither and thither, beating, buzzing, on ceiling and wall. I flung down my book and stepped forward. Now it lay fluttering upon the window sill, and for a moment I had it under my hand, but the thing squeaked and I shrank back. Then suddenly it darted across the candle flame; the light flared and went out, and at the same moment a shadow moved in the darkness outside. I raised my eyes to the window. A masked face was peering in at me.

Quick as thought I whipped out my revolver and fired every cartridge, but the face advanced beyond the window, the glass melting away before it like mist, and through the smoke of my revolver I saw something creep swiftly into the room. Then I tried to cry out, but the thing was at my throat, and I fell backward among the ashes of the hearth.

* * *

When my eyes unclosed I was lying on the hearth, my head among the cold ashes. Slowly I got on my knees, rose painfully, and groped my way to a chair. On the floor lay my revolver, shining in the pale light of early morning. My mind clearing by degrees, I looked, shuddering, at the window. The glass was unbroken. I stooped stiffly, picked up my revolver and opened the cylinder. Every cartridge had been fired. Mechanically I closed the cylinder and placed the revolver in my pocket. The book, the Chronicles of Jacques Sorgue, lay on the table beside me, and as I started to close it I glanced at the page. It was all splashed with rain, and the lettering had run, so that the page was merely a confused blur of gold and red and black. As I stumbled toward the door I cast a fearful glance over my shoulder. The death's-head moth crawled shivering on the rug.

IV

The sun was about three hours high. I must have slept, for I was aroused by the sudden gallop of horses under our window. People were shouting and calling in the road. I sprang up and opened the sash. Le Bihan was there, an image of helplessness, and Max Fortin stood beside him, polishing his glasses. Some gendarmes had just arrived from Quimperlé, and I could hear them around the corner of the house, stamping, and rattling their sabres and carbines, as they led their horses into my stable.

Lys sat up, murmuring half-sleepy, half-anxious questions.

"I don't know," I answered. "I am going out to see what it means."

"It is like the day they came to arrest you," Lys said, giving me a troubled look. But I kissed her, and laughed at her until she smiled too. Then I flung on coat and cap and hurried down the stairs.

The first person I saw standing in the road was the Brigadier Durand.

"Hello!" said I, "have you come to arrest me again? What the devil is all this fuss about, anyway?"

"We were telegraphed for an hour ago," said Durand Briskly, "and for a sufficient reason, I think. Look there, Monsieur Darrel!"

He pointed to the ground almost under my feet.

"Good heavens!" I cried, "where did that puddle of blood come from?"

"That's what I want to know, Monsieur Darrel. Max Fortin found it at daybreak. See, it's splashed all over the grass, too. A trail of it leads into your garden, across the flower beds to your very window, the one that opens from the morning room. There is another trail leading from this spot across the road to the cliffs, then to the gravel pit, and thence across the moor to the forest of Kerselec. We are going to mount in a minute and search the bosquets. Will you join us? Bon Dieu! but the fellow bled like an ox. Max Fortin says it's human blood, or I should not have believed it."

The little chemist of Quimperlé came up at that moment, rubbing his glasses with a coloured handkerchief.

"Yes, it is human blood," he said, "but one thing puzzles me: the corpuscles are yellow. I never saw any human blood before with yellow corpuscles. But your English Doctor Thompson asserts that he has—"

"Well, it's human blood, anyway—isn't it?" insisted Durand, impatiently.

"Ye-es," admitted Max Fortin.

"Then it's my business to trail it," said the big gendarme, and he called his men and gave the order to mount.

"Did you hear anything last night?" asked Durand of me.

"I heard the rain. I wonder the rain did not wash away these traces."

"They must have come after the rain ceased. See this thick splash, how it lies over and weighs down the wet grass blades. Pah!"

It was a heavy, evil-looking clot, and I stepped back from it, my throat closing in disgust.

"My theory," said the brigadier, "is this: Some of those Biribi fishermen, probably the Icelanders, got an extra glass of cognac into their hides and quarrelled on the road. Some of them were slashed, and staggered to your house. But there is only one trail, and yet—and yet, how could all that blood come from only one person? Well, the wounded man, let us say, staggered first to your house and then back here, and he wandered off, drunk and dying, God knows where. That's my theory."

"A very good one," said I calmly. "And you are going to trail him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"At once. Will you come?"

"Not now. I'll gallop over by-and-by. You are going to the edge of the Kerselec forest?"

"Yes; you will hear us calling. Are you coming, Max Fortin? And you, Le Bihan? Good; take the dog-cart."

The big gendarme tramped around the corner to the stable and presently returned mounted on a strong gray horse; his sabre shone on his saddle; his pale yellow and white facings were spotless. The little crowd of white-coiffed women with their children fell back, as Durand touched spurs and clattered away followed by his two troopers. Soon after Le Bihan and Max Fortin also departed in the mayor's dingy dog-cart.

"Are you coming?" piped Le Bihan shrilly.

"In a quarter of an hour," I replied, and went back to the house.

When I opened the door of the morning room the death's-head moth was beating its strong wings against the window. For a second I hesitated, then walked over and opened the sash. The creature fluttered out, whirred over the flower beds a moment, then darted across the moorland toward the sea. I called the servants together and questioned them. Josephine, Catherine, Jean Marie Tregunc, not one of them had heard the slightest disturbance during the night. Then I told Jean Marie to saddle my horse, and while I was speaking Lys came down.

"Dearest," I began, going to her.

"You must tell me everything you know, Dick," she interrupted, looking me earnestly in the face.

"But there is nothing to tell—only a drunken brawl, and some one wounded."

"And you are going to ride—where, Dick?"

"Well, over to the edge of Kerselec forest. Durand and the mayor, and Max Fortin, have gone on, following a—a trail."

"What trail?"

"Some blood."

"Where did they find it?"

"Out in the road there." Lys crossed herself.

"Does it come near our house?"

"Yes."

"How near?"

"It comes up to the morning-room window," said I, giving in.

Her hand on my arm grew heavy. "I dreamed last night—"

"So did I—" but I thought of the empty cartridges in my revolver, and stopped.

"I dreamed that you were in great danger, and I could not move hand or foot to save you; but you had your revolver, and I called out to you to fire—"

"I did fire!" I cried excitedly.

"You—you fired?"

I took her in my arms. "My darling," I said, "something strange has happened—something that I cannot understand as yet. But, of course, there is an explanation. Last night I thought I fired at the Black Priest."

"Ah!" gasped Lys.

"Is that what you dreamed?"

"Yes, yes, that was it! I begged you to fire—"

"And I did."

Her heart was beating against my breast. I held her close in silence.

"Dick," she said at length, "perhaps you killed the—the thing."

"If it was human I did not miss," I answered grimly. "And it was human," I went on, pulling myself together, ashamed of having so nearly gone to pieces. "Of course it was human! The whole affair is plain enough. Not a drunken brawl, as Durand thinks; it was a drunken lout's practical joke, for which he has suffered. I suppose I must have filled him pretty full of bullets, and he has crawled away to die in Kerselec forest. It's a terrible affair; I'm sorry I fired so hastily; but that idiot Le Bihan and Max Fortin have been working on my nerves till I am as hysterical as a schoolgirl," I ended angrily.

"You fired—but the window glass was not shattered," said Lys in a low voice.

"Well, the window was open, then. And as for the—the rest—I've got nervous indigestion, and a doctor will settle the Black Priest for me, Lys."

I glanced out of the window at Tregunc waiting with my horse at the gate.

"Dearest, I think I had better go to join Durand and the others."

"I will go too."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes, Dick."

"Don't, Lys."

"I shall suffer every moment you are away."

"The ride is too fatiguing, and we can't tell what unpleasant sight you may come upon. Lys, you don't really think there is anything supernatural in this affair?"

"Dick," she answered gently, "I am a Bretonne." With both arms around my neck, my wife said, "Death is the gift of God. I do not fear it when we are together. But alone—oh, my husband, I should fear a God who could take you away from me!"

We kissed each other soberly, simply, like two children. Then Lys hurried away to change her gown, and I paced up and down the garden waiting for her.

She came, drawing on her slender gauntlets. I swung her into the saddle, gave a hasty order to Jean Marie, and mounted.

Now, to quail under thoughts of terror on a morning like this, with Lys in the saddle beside me, no matter what had happened or might happen, was impossible. Moreover, Môme came sneaking after us. I asked Tregunc to catch him, for I was afraid he might be brained by our horses' hoofs if he followed, but the wily puppy dodged and bolted after Lys, who was trotting along the high-road. "Never mind," I thought; "if he's hit he'll live, for he has no brains to lose."

Lys was waiting for me in the road beside the Shrine of Our Lady of St. Gildas when I joined her. She crossed herself, I doffed my cap, then we shook out our bridles and galloped toward the forest of Kerselec.

We said very little as we rode. I always loved to watch Lys in the saddle. Her exquisite figure and lovely face were the incarnation of youth and grace; her curling hair glistened like threaded gold.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw the spoiled puppy Môme come bounding cheerfully alongside, oblivious of our horses' heels. Our road swung close to the cliffs. A filthy cormorant rose from the black rocks and flapped heavily across our path. Lys's horse reared, but she pulled him down, and pointed at the bird with her riding crop.

"I see," said I; "it seems to be going our way. Curious to see a cormorant in a forest, isn't it?"

"It is a bad sign," said Lys. "You know that Morbihan proverb: 'When the cormorant turns from the sea, Death laughs in the forest, and wise woodsmen build boats.'"

"I wish," said I sincerely, "that there were fewer proverbs in Brittany."

We were in sight of the forest now; across the gorse I could see the sparkle of gendarmes' trappings, and the glitter of Le Bihan's silver-buttoned jacket. The hedge was low and we took it without difficulty, and trotted across the moor to where Le Bihan and Durand stood gesticulating.

They bowed ceremoniously to Lys as we rode up.

"The trail is horrible—it is a river," said the mayor in his squeaky voice. "Monsieur Darrel, I think perhaps madame would scarcely care to come any nearer."

Lys drew bridle and looked at me.

"It is horrible!" said Durand, walking up beside me; "it looks as though a bleeding regiment had passed this way. The trail winds and winds about there in the thickets; we lose it at times, but we always find it again. I can't understand how one man—no, nor twenty—could bleed like that!"

A halloo, answered by another, sounded from the depths of the forest.

"It's my men; they are following the trail," muttered the brigadier. "God alone knows what is at the end!"

"Shall we gallop back, Lys?" I asked.

"No; let us ride along the western edge of the woods and dismount. The sun is so hot now, and I should like to rest for a moment," she said.

"The western forest is clear of anything disagreeable," said Durand.

"Very well," I answered; "call me, Le Bihan, if you find anything."

Lys wheeled her mare, and I followed across the springy heather, Môme trotting cheerfully in the rear.

We entered the sunny woods about a quarter of a kilometre from where we left Durand. I took Lys from her horse, flung both bridles over a limb, and, giving my wife my arm, aided her to a flat mossy rock which overhung a shallow brook gurgling among the beech trees. Lys sat down and drew off her gauntlets. Môme pushed his head into her lap, received an undeserved caress, and came doubtfully toward me. I was weak enough to condone his offence, but I made him lie down at my feet, greatly to his disgust.

I rested my head on Lys's knees, looking up at the sky through the crossed branches of the trees.

"I suppose I have killed him," I said. "It shocks me terribly, Lys."

"You could not have known, dear. He may have been a robber, and—if—not— Did—have you ever fired your revolver since that day four years ago, when the Red Admiral's son tried to kill you? But I know you have not."

"No," said I, wondering. "It's a fact, I have not. Why?"

"And don't you remember that I asked you to let me load it for you the day when Yves went off, swearing to kill you and his father?"

"Yes, I do remember. Well?"

"Well, I—I took the cartridges first to St. Gildas chapel and dipped them in holy water. You must not laugh, Dick," said Lys gently, laying her cool hands on my lips.

"Laugh, my darling!"

Overhead the October sky was pale amethyst, and the sunlight burned like orange flame through the yellow leaves of beech and oak. Gnats and midges danced and wavered overhead; a spider dropped from a twig halfway to the ground and hung suspended on the end of his gossamer thread.

"Are you sleepy, dear?" asked Lys, bending over me.

"I am—a little; I scarcely slept two hours last night," I answered.

"You may sleep, if you wish," said Lys, and touched my eyes caressingly.

"Is my head heavy on your knees?"

"No, Dick."

I was already in a half doze; still I heard the brook babbling under the beeches and the humming of forest flies overhead. Presently even these were stilled.

The next thing I knew I was sitting bolt upright, my ears ringing with a scream, and I saw Lys cowering beside me, covering her white face with both hands.

As I sprang to my feet she cried again and clung to my knees. I saw my dog rush growling into a thicket, then I heard him whimper, and he came backing out, whining, ears flat, tail down. I stooped and disengaged Lys's hand.

"Don't go, Dick!" she cried. "O God, it's the Black Priest!"

In a moment I had leaped across the brook and pushed my way into the thicket. It was empty. I stared about me; I scanned every tree trunk, every bush. Suddenly I saw him. He was seated on a fallen log, his head resting in his hands, his rusty black robe gathered around him. For a moment my hair stirred under my cap; sweat started on my forehead and cheekbone; then I recovered my reason, and understood that the man was human and was probably wounded to death. Ay, to death; for there, at my feet, lay the wet trail of blood, over leaves and stones, down into the little hollow, across to the figure in black resting silently under the trees.

I saw that he could not escape even if he had the strength, for before him, almost at his very feet, lay a deep, shining swamp.

As I stepped forward my foot broke a twig. At the sound the figure started a little, then its head fell forward again. Its face was masked. Walking up to the man, I bade him tell where he was wounded. Durand and the others broke through the thicket at the same moment and hurried to my side.

"Who are you who hide a masked face in a priest's robe?" said the gendarme loudly.

There was no answer.

"See—see the stiff blood all over his robe!" muttered Le Bihan to Fortin.

"He will not speak," said I.

"He may be too badly wounded," whispered Le Bihan.

"I saw him raise his head," I said; "my wife saw him creep up here."

Durand stepped forward and touched the figure.

"Speak!" he said.

"Speak!" quavered Fortin.

Durand waited a moment, then with a sudden upward movement he stripped off the mask and threw back the man's head. We were looking into the eye sockets of a skull. Durand stood rigid; the mayor shrieked. The skeleton burst out from its rotting robes and collapsed on the ground before us. From between the staring ribs and the grinning teeth spurted a torrent of black blood, showering the shrinking grasses; then the thing shuddered, and fell over into the black ooze of the bog. Little bubbles of iridescent air appeared from the mud; the bones were slowly engulfed, and, as the last fragments sank out of sight, up from the depths and along the bank crept a creature, shiny, shivering, quivering its wings.

It was a death's-head moth.

* * *

I wish I had time to tell you how Lys outgrew superstitions—for she never knew the truth about the affair, and she never will know, since she has promised not to read this book. I wish I might tell you about the king and his coronation, and how the coronation robe fitted. I wish that I were able to write how Yvonne and Herbert Stuart rode to a boar hunt in Quimperlé, and how the hounds raced the quarry right through the town, overturning three gendarmes, the notary, and an old woman. But I am becoming garrulous, and Lys is calling me to come and hear the king say that he is sleepy. And his Highness shall not be kept waiting.

* * *

THE KING'S CRADLE SONG

Seal with a seal of gold
The scroll of a life unrolled;
Swathe him deep in his purple stole;
Ashes of diamonds, crystalled coal,
Drops of gold in each scented fold.

Crimson wings of the Little Death,
Stir his hair with your silken breath;
Flaming wings of sins to be,
Splendid pinions of prophecy,
Smother his eyes with hues and dyes,
While the white moon spins and the winds arise,
And the stars drip through the skies.

Wave, O wings of the Little Death!
Seal his sight and stifle his breath,
Cover his breast with the gemmed shroud pressed;
From north to north, from west to west,
Wave, O wings of the Little Death!
Till the white moon reels in the cracking skies,
And the ghosts of God arise. ❋

The White Shadow

We are no other than a moving row
Of magic shadow-shapes, that come and go
Round with this sun-illumined lantern, held
In midnight by the master of the show.

A moment's halt—a momentary taste
Of being from the well amid the waste—
And lo! the phantom caravan has reached
The nothing it set out from. Oh, make haste!

Ah, Love! could you and I with him conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Remould it nearer to the heart's desire!
FITZGERALD

Listen, then, love, and with your white hand clear
Your forehead from its cloudy hair.

I

Three great hulking cousins," said she, closing her gray eyes disdainfully.

We accepted the rebuke in astonished silence. Presently she opened her eyes, and seemed surprised to see us there yet.

"O," she said, "if you think I am going to stay here until you make up your minds—"

"I've made up mine," said Donald. "We will go to the links. You may come."

"I shall not," she announced. "Walter, what do you propose?"

Walter looked at his cartridge belt and then at the little breech-loader standing in a corner of the arbour.

"Oh, I know," she said, "but I won't! I won't! I won't!"

The uncles and aunts on the piazza turned to look at us; her mother arose from a steamer-chair and came across the lawn.

"Won't what, Sweetheart?" she asked, placing both hands on her daughter's shoulders.

"Mamma, Walter wants me to shoot, and Don wants me to play golf, and I—won't!"

"She doesn't know what she wants," said I.

"Don't I?" she said, flushing with displeasure.

"Her mother might suggest something," hazarded Donald. We looked at our aunt.

"Sweetheart is spoiled," said that lady decisively. "If you children don't go away at once and have a good time, I shall find employment for her."

"Algebra?" I asked maliciously.

"How dare you!" cried Sweetheart, sitting up. "Oh, isn't he mean! isn't he ignoble!—and I've done my algebra; haven't I, mamma?"

"But your French?" I began.

Donald laughed, and so did Walter. As for Sweetheart, she arose in all the dignity of sixteen years, closed her eyes with superb insolence, and, clasping her mother's waist with one round white arm, marched out of the arbour.

"We tease her too much," said Donald.

"She's growing up fast; we ought not to call her 'Sweetheart' when she puts her hair up," added Walter.

"She's going to put it up in October, when she goes back to school," said Donald. "Jack, she will hate you if you keep reminding her of her algebra and French."

"Then I'll stop," said I, suddenly conscious what an awful thing it would be if she hated me.

Donald's two pointers came frisking across the lawn from the kennels, and Donald picked up his gun.

"Here we go again," said I. "Donny's going to the coverts after grouse, Walter's going up on the hill with his dust-shot and arsenic, and I'm going across the fields after butterflies. Why the deuce can't we all go together, just for once?"

"And take Sweetheart? She would like it if we all went together," said Walter; "she is tired of seeing Jack net butterflies."

"Collecting birds and shooting grouse are two different things," began Donald. "You spoil my dogs by shooting your confounded owls and humming birds."

"Oh, your precious dogs!" I cried. "Shut up, Donny, and give Sweetheart a good day's tramp. It's a pity if three cousins can't pool their pleasures for once."

Donald nodded uncertainly.

"Come on," said Walter, "we'll find Sweetheart. Jack, you get your butterfly togs and come back here."

I nodded, and watched my two cousins sauntering across the lawn—big, clean-cut fellows, resembling each other enough to be brothers instead of cousins.

We all resembled each other more or less, Donald, Walter, and I. As for Sweetheart, she looked like none of us.

It was all very well for her mother to call her Sweetheart, and for her aunts to echo it in chorus, but the time was coming when we saw we should have to stop. A girl of sixteen with such a name is ridiculous, and Sweetheart was nearly seventeen; and her hair was "going up" and her gowns were "coming down" in October.

Her own name was pretty enough. I don't know that I ought to tell it, but I will: it was the same as her mother's. We called her Sweetheart sometimes, sometimes "The Aspen Beauty." Donald had given her that name from a butterfly in my collection, the *Vanessa Pandora,* commonly known as the Aspen beauty, from its never having been captured in America except in our village of Aspen.

Here, in the north of New York State, we four cousins spent our summers in the family house. There was not much to do in Aspen. We used the links, we galloped over the sandy roads, we also trotted our several hobbies, Donald, Walter, and I. Sweetheart had no hobby; to make up for this, however, she owned a magnificent team of bêtes-noires—Algebra and French.

As for me, my butterfly collection languished. I had specimens of nearly every butterfly in New York State, and I rather longed for new states to conquer. Anyway, there were plenty of Aspen beauties—I mean the butterflies—flying about the roads and balm-of-Gilead trees, and perhaps that is why I lingered there long enough to collect hundreds of duplicates for exchange. And perhaps it wasn't.

I thought of these things as I sat in the sun-flecked arbour, watching the yellow elm leaves flutter down from the branches. I thought, too, of Sweetheart, and wondered how she would look with her hair up. And while I sat there smoking, watching the yellow leaves drifting across the lawn, a sharp explosion startled me and I raised my head.

Sweetheart was standing on the lawn, gazing dreamily at the smoking débris of a large firecracker.

"What's that for?" I asked.

"It proclaims my independence," said Sweetheart—"my independence forever. Hereafter my cousins will ask to accompany me on my walks; they need no longer charitably permit me to accompany them. Are you three boys going to ride your hobbies?"

"We are," I said.

"Then good-bye. I am going to walk."

"Can't we come too?" I asked, laughing.

"Oh," she said graciously, "if you put it in that way I could not refuse."

"May we bring our guns?" asked Donald from the piazza.

"May I bring my net?" I added, half amused, half annoyed.

She made a gesture, indifferent, condescending.

"Dear me!" murmured the aunts in chorus from the piazza as we trooped after the Aspen Beauty, "Sweetheart is growing very fast."

I smiled vaguely at Sweetheart. I was wondering how she would look in long frocks and coiled hair.

II

In the fall of the year the meadows of Aspen glimmer in the sunlight like crumpled sheets of beaten gold; for Aspen is the land of golden-rod, of yellow earth and gilded fern.

There the crisp oaks rustle, every leaf a blot of yellow; there the burnished pines sound, sound, tremble, and resound, like gilt-stringed harps aquiver in the wind.

Sweet fern, sun-dried, bronzed, fills all the hills with incense, vague and delicate as the white down drifting from the frothy milkweed.

And where the meadow brook prattled, limpid, filtered with sunlight, Sweetheart stood knee-deep in fragrant mint, watching the aimless minnows swimming in circles. On a distant hill, dark against the blue, Donald moved with his dogs, and I saw the sun-glint on his gun, and I heard the distant "Hi—on! Hi—on!" long after he disappeared below the brown hill's brow.

Walter, too, had gone, leaving us there by the brook together, Sweetheart and I; and I saw the crows flapping and circling far over the woods, and I heard the soft report of his dust-shot shells among the trees.

"The ruling passion, Sweetheart," I said. "Donny chases the phantom of pleasure with his dogs. The phantom flies from Walter, and he follows with his dust-shot."

"Then," said Sweetheart, "follow your phantom also; there are butterflies everywhere." She raised both arms and turned from the brook. "Everywhere flying I see butterflies—phantoms of pleasure; and, Jack, you do not follow with your net."

"No," said I, "the world to-day is too fair to—slay in. I even doubt that the happiness of empires hinges on the discovery of a new species of anything. Do I bore you?"

"A little," said Sweetheart, touching the powdered gold of the blossoms about her. She laid the tip of her third finger on her lips and then on the golden-rod. "I shall not pick it; the world is too fair to-day," she said. "What are you going to do, Jack?"

"I could doze," I said. "Could you?"

"Yes—if you told me stories."

I contemplated her in silence for a moment. After a while she sat down under an oak and clasped her hands.

"I am growing so old," she sighed, "I no longer take pleasure in childish things—Donald's dogs, Walter's humming birds, your butterflies. Jack?"

"What?"

"Sit down on the grass."

"What for?"

"Because I ask you."

I sat down.

Presently she said: "I am as tall as mamma. Why should I study algebra?"

"Because," I answered evasively.

"Your answer is as rude as though I were twenty, instead of sixteen," said Sweetheart. "If you treat me as a child from this moment, I shall hate you."

"Me—Sweetheart?"

"And that name!—it is good for children and kittens."

I looked at her seriously. "It is good for women, too—when it is time," I said. "I prophesy that one day you will hear it again. As for me, I shall not call you by that name if you dislike it."

"I am a woman—now," she said.

"Oh! at sixteen."

"To-morrow I am to be seventeen."

Presently, looking off at the blue hills, I said: "For a long time I have recognised that subtle, indefinable attitude—we call it deference—due from men to women is due from us to you. Donny and Walter are slower to accept this. You know what you have been to us as a child; we can't bear to lose you—to meet you in another way—to reckon with you as we reckon with a woman. But it is true: our little Sweetheart has vanished, and—*you* are here!"

The oak leaves began to rustle in the hill winds; the crows cawed from the woods.

"Oui c'est moi," she said at length.

"I shall never call you Sweetheart again," I said, smiling.

"Who knows?" she laughed, and leaned over to pick a blade of wild wheat. She coloured faintly a moment later, and said: "I didn't mean that, Jack."

And so Sweetheart took her first step across that threshold of mystery, the Temple of Idols. And of the gilded idols within the temple, one shall turn to living flesh at the sound of a voice. And lo! where a child had entered, a woman returned with the key to the Temple of Gilded Idols.

"Jack," said Sweetheart, "you are wrong. No day is too fair to kill in. I shall pick my arms full—full of flowers."

Over the yellow fields, red with the stalks of the buckwheat, crowned with a glimmering cloud of the dusty gold of the golden-rod, Sweetheart passed, pensive, sedate, awed by the burden of sixteen years.

I followed.

Over the curling fern and wind-stirred grasses the silken milkweed seeds sailed, sailed, and the great red-brown butterflies drifted above, ruddy as autumn leaves aglow in the sun.

"On the sand-cliff there are marigolds," said Sweetheart.

I looked at the mass of wild flowers in her arms; her white polished skin reflected the blaze of colour, warming like ivory under their glow.

"Marigolds," I repeated; "we will get some."

"The sand slides on the face of the cliff; you must be careful," she said.

"And I may see one of those rare cliff butterflies. I haven't any good examples."

I fancy she was not listening; the crows were clamouring above the beech woods; the hill winds filled our ears with a sound like the sound of the sea on shoals. Her gray eyes, touched with the sky's deep blue and the blue of the misty hills, looked out across the miles of woods and fields, and saw a world; not a world of old, scarred, rock-ribbed, and salt with tears, but a new world, youthful, ripe, sunny, hazy with the splendour of wonders hidden behind the horizon—a world jewelled with gems, spanned by rose-mist rainbows—a world of sixteen years.

"We are already at the cliff's edge," I said.

She stepped to the edge and looked over. I drew her back. The sand started among the rocks, running with a sound like silver water.

"Then you shall not go either," she said. "I do not care for marigolds."

But I was already on the edge, stooping for a blossom. The next instant I fell.

There was a whistle of sand, a flurry and a rush of wind, a blur of rock, fern, dead grasses—a cry!

For I remember as I fell, falling I called, "Sweetheart!" and again "Sweetheart!" Then my body struck the rocks below.

III

Of all the seconds that tick the whole year through, of all the seconds that have slipped onward marking the beat of time since time was loosed, there is one, one brief moment, steeped in magic and heavy with oblivion, that sometimes lingers in the soul of man, annihilating space and time. If, at the feet of God, a year is a second passed unnoted, this magic second, afloat on the tide of time, moves on and on till, caught in the vortex of some life's whirl, it sinks into the soul of a being near to death.

And in that soul the magic second glows and lingers, stretching into minutes, hours, days—aye, days and days, till, if the magic hold, the calm years crowd on one by one; and yet it all is but a second—that magic [illegible] that comes on the [illegible] of [illegible] my [illegible] and [illegible] up [illegible] a [illegible] dropping [illegible] between [illegible].

And so that magic moment grew to [illegible], to hours, and when the [illegible], whirling, [illegible] had been flung out on the earth, the magic [illegible] until the [illegible] one by one, till there the [illegible] half-kneeling.

Those days of a life that I have lived, those years that [illegible] in the [illegible] behind me, [illegible] splendid as [illegible]; but [illegible] such a second as [illegible] as I wrote, quick, sharp [illegible]! So, of that magic second, or [illegible], I shall tell: [illegible] as I was standing beside [illegible] there across the [illegible].

I looked at [illegible] at a [illegible] the [illegible] cliff [illegible].

"Sweetheart!" I called.

But she was already at my side.

We walked on through fragrant [illegible], [illegible] long [illegible] back to [illegible], speaking of what had been and of all that was to be. It was so simple; everything was [illegible] behind us. Had there [illegible] Sweetheart?

If there had been, now they were ended forever.

"Not forever," said Sweetheart. "Who knows how long [illegible] might [illegible] and [illegible]?"

"But we—what difference can that make?" I asked.

"To us?"

"Yes."

"None," said Sweetheart [illegible].

We looked out into the west. The sun [illegible] the hills [illegible].

"But—but—your shadow!" said Sweetheart.

I bent my head, thrilled with happiness.

"And yours," I whispered.

The shadows we cast were whiter than snow.

I [illegible] the [illegible] wind [illegible] came from the [illegible] woodland; a star broke [illegible].

"What is your pleasure, Sweetheart, now all is said?" I asked.

"The world is all so [illegible]," she sighed. "Is it [illegible] beyond the hills, [illegible]?"

[illegible] Shall we go?"

"But in the spring—let us wait until spring."

"Where?"

"Here."

"Until spring?"

"It is written that Time shall pass as a shadow across the sea. What is that book there under your feet—that iron-bound book, half embedded like a stone in the grass."

"I did not see it!"

"Bring it to me."

I raised the book; it left a bare mark in the sod as a stone that is turned. Then, holding it on my knees, I opened it, and Sweetheart, leaning on my shoulder, read. The tall stars flared like candles, flooding the page with diamond light; the earth, perfumed with blossoms, stirred with the vague vibration of countless sounds, tiny voices swaying breathless in the hidden surge of an endless harmony.

"The white shadow is the shadow of the soul," she read. Even the winds were hushed as her sweet lips moved.

"And what shall make thee to understand what hell is? . . . When the sun shall be folded up as a garment that is laid away; when the stars fall and the seas boil, and when souls shall be joined again to their bodies; and when the girl who hath been buried alive shall be asked for what crime; when books shall be laid open, when hell shall burn fiercely, and when paradise shall be brought very near:

"Every soul shall know what it hath wrought!"

I closed my eyes; the splendour of the starlight on the page was more than my eyes could bear.

But she read on; for what can dim her eyes?

"O man, verily labouring, thou labourest to meet thy Lord.

"And thou shalt meet HIM!

"When the earth shall be stretched like a skin, and shall cast forth that which is therein;

"By the heaven adorned with signs; by the witness and the witnessed!

"By that which appeareth by night; by the daybreak and the ten nights—the ten nights;

"The night of Al Kadr is better than a thousand months.

"Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures, the Most Merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment. Thee do we worship, and of thee do we beg assistance. Direct us in the right way, in the way of those to whom thou hast been gracious, not of those against whom thou art incensed, nor of those who go astray!"

* * *

In the sudden silence that spread across earth and heaven I heard the sound of a voice under the earth, calling, calling, calling.

"It is already spring," said Sweetheart; and she rose, placing her white hands in mine. "Shall we go?"

"But we are already there," I stammered, turning my eyes fearfully; for the tall pines dwindled and clustered and rose again cool and gray in the morning air, all turned to stone, fretted and carved like lacework; and where the pines had faded, the twin towers of a cathedral loomed; and where the hills swept across the horizon, the roofs of a white city glimmered in the morning sun. Bridges and quays and streets and domes and the hum of traffic and rattle of arms; and over all, the veil of haze and the twin gray towers of Notre Dame!

"Sweetheart!" I faltered.

But we were already in my studio.

IV

The studio had not changed. The sun flooded it.

Sweetheart sat in the broken armchair and watched me struggle with the packing. Every now and then she made an impulsive movement toward the heap of clothes on the floor, which I checked with a "Thanks! I can fix it all alone, Sweetheart."

Clifford seemed to extract amusement from it all, and said as much to Rowden, who was as usual ruining my zitherine by trying to play it like a banjo.

Elliott, knowing he could be of no use to us, had the decency to sit outside the studio on one of the garden benches. He appeared at intervals at the studio door, saying, "Come along, Clifford; they don't want you messing about. Drop that banjo, Rowden, or Jack will break your head with it—won't you, Jack?"

I said I would, but not with the zitherine.

Clifford flatly refused to move unless Sweetheart would take him out into our garden and show him the solitary goldfish which lurked in the fountain under the almond trees. But Sweetheart, apparently fascinated by the mysteries of packing, turned a deaf ear to Clifford's blandishments and Rowden's discords.

"I imagined," said Clifford, somewhat hurt, "that you would delight in taking upon yourself the duties of a hostess. I should be pleased to believe that I am not an unwelcome guest."

"So should I," echoed Rowden; "I'd be pleased too."

"What a shame for you to bother, Jack!" she said. "Mr. Clifford shall go and make some tea directly. Mr. Rowden, you may take a table out by the fountain—and stay there."

Clifford, motioning Elliott to take the other end of the Japanese table, backed with it through the hallway and out to the gravel walk, expostulating.

"The sugar is there in that tin box by the model stand," she said, when he reappeared,"and the extra spoons are lying in a long box on Jack's big easel."

When Rowden, reluctantly relinquishing the zitherine, followed Clifford, bearing the cups and alcohol lamp, I raised my head and wiped the dust from my forehead. I believe I swore a little in French. Sweetheart looked startled. She knew more French than I supposed she did.

"What is it, Jack?"

"Mais—rien, ça m'embête—cette espèce de malle—"

"Then why won't you let me help you, Jack? I can at least put in my gowns."

"But I must pack my colour box first, and the gun case, and the box of reels, and the pastel case, and our shooting boots, and the water-colour box, and the cartridge belt, and your golf shoes, and—"

"O dear!" said Sweetheart with a shudder.

I stood up and scowled at the trunk.

"To look at you, Jack," murmured Sweetheart, "one might think you unhappy."

Unhappy! At the thought our eyes met across the table.

"Unhappy!" I whispered.

Then Clifford came stumbling in, wearing a pair of Joseph's sabots, and, imitating that faithful domestic in voice and manner, invited us to tea under the lilacs and almond blossoms.

"In a moment," cried Sweetheart impatiently. "Go and pour the tea."

Clifford looked aghast. "No, no!" he cried; "it's impossible—I won't believe that you two are deliberately getting rid of me so you can be alone to spoon! And your honeymoon already a year old, and—"

Sweetheart frowned, and tapped her foot.

Clifford retired indignant.

Then she raised her eyes to mine, and a delicate colour stained her cheeks and neck.

"Yes," I said, "we have been married nearly a year, Sweetheart."

We looked at our white shadows on the floor.

V

Sweetheart sat under the lilac blossoms pouring out tea for Clifford, Elliott, and Rowden. She was gracious to Clifford, gentle to Elliott, and she took Rowden under her wing in the sweetest way possible, to which Clifford stated his objections.

"Mr. Rowden is younger than you are," she said gravely. "Monsieur Clifford, I do not wish you to torment him."

"Rowden's no baby; he's as old as Jack is, and Jack doesn't murder music."

"I am glad to see you acknowledge Jack's superiority in all matters," said Sweetheart with a dangerous smile.

"I don't," cried Clifford laughing; "and I don't see what you find to care about in a man who clips his hair like a gendarme and paints everything purple."

"Everything is purple—if Jack paints it so," said Sweetheart, smiling at her reflected face in the water. She stood at the rim of the little stone fountain with her hands clasped behind her back. Elliott and Clifford were poking about in the water plants to dislodge the solitary goldfish, while Rowden gathered dewy clusters of lilacs as an offering.

"There he goes!" said Elliott.

"Poor fellow, living there all alone!" said Sweetheart. "Jack must leave word with Joseph to get him a little lady fish to pay his court to."

"Better put in another gentleman fish, then, if you're following Nature," said Clifford, with an attempt at cynicism which drew the merriest laugh from Sweetheart.

"Oh, how funny is Monsieur Clifford when he wants to be like Frenchmen!" she murmured.

"Jack," said Elliott, as I came from the studio and picked up a cup of tea grown cold, "Clifford's doing the world-worn disenchanted roué."

"And—and I fear he will next make love to me!" cried Sweetheart.

"You'd better look out, Jack," said Clifford darkly, and pretended to sulk until Sweetheart sent him off to buy the bonbons she would need for the train.

"They're packed," I said, "every trunk of them!"

Sweetheart was enchanted. "All my new gowns, and the shoes from Rix's—O Jack, you didn't forget the shoes—and the bath robes—and—"

"All packed," I said, swallowing the tea with a wry face.

"Oh," she cried reproachfully, "don't drink that! Here, I will have some hot tea in a moment," and she ran over and perched on the arm of the garden bench while I lighted the alcohol lamp and then a cigarette.

Rowden came up with his offering of lilacs, and she decorated each of us with a spray.

It was growing late. The long shadows fell across the gravel walks and flecked the white walls of the sculptor's studio opposite.

"It's the nine-o'clock train, isn't it?" said Elliott.

"We will meet you at the station at eight-thirty," added Rowden.

"You don't mind, do you, our dining alone?" said Sweetheart shyly; "it's our last day—Jack's and mine—in the old studio."

"Not the last, I hope," said Elliott sincerely.

We all sat silent for a moment.

"O Paris, Paris—how I fear it!" murmured Sweetheart to me; and in the same breath, "No, no, we must love it, you and I."

Then Elliott said aloud, "I suppose you have no idea when you will return?"

"No," I replied, thinking of the magic second that had become a year.

And so we dined alone, Sweetheart and I, in the old studio.

At half-past eight o'clock the cab stood at the gate with all our traps piled on top, and Joseph and his wife and the two brats were crying, "Au revoir, madame! au revoir, monsieur! We will keep the studio well dusted. Bon voyage! bon voyage!" and all of a sudden my arm was caught by Sweetheart's little gloved hand, and she drew me back through the long ivy-covered alley to the garden where the studio stood, its doorway closed and silent, the hollow windows black and grim. Truly the light had passed away with the passing of Sweetheart. Her hand slipped from my arm, and she went and knelt down at the threshold and kissed it.

"I first knew happiness when I first crossed it," she said; "it breaks my heart to leave it. Only that magic second! but it seems years that we have lived here."

"It was you who brought happiness to it," I said.

"Good-bye! good-bye, dear, dear, old studio!" she cried. "Oh, if Jack is always the same to me as he has been here—if he will be faithful and true in that new home!"

The new home was to be in a strange land. Sweetheart was a little frightened, but was dying to go there. Sweetheart had never seen the golden gorse ablaze on the moors of Morbihan.

VI

I went inside the brass railing and waited my turn to buy the tickets. When it came, I took two first class to Quimperlé, for it was to be an all-night ride, and there was no sleeping car. Clifford had taken charge of the baggage, and I went with him to have it registered, leaving Sweetheart with Elliott and Rowden. All the traps were there—the big trunks, the big valises, my sketching kit, the zitherine in a leather case, two handbags, a bundle of umbrellas and canes, and a huge package of canvases. The toilet case and the rugs and waterproofs we took with us into the compartment.

The compartment was empty. Sweetheart nestled into one corner, and when I had placed our traps in the racks overhead I sat down opposite, while Clifford handed in our sandwiches, a bottle of red wine, and Sweetheart's box of bonbons.

We didn't say much; most had been said before starting. Clifford was more affected than he cared to show—I know by the way he grasped my hand. They are dear fellows, every one. We did not realize that we were actually going—going, perhaps, forever. She laughed, and chatted, and made fun of Clifford, and teased Rowden, aided and abetted by Elliott, until the starting gong clanged and a warning whistle sounded along the gaslit platform.

"Jack," cried Clifford, leaning in the window, "God bless you! God bless you both!"

Elliott touched her hand and wrung mine, and Rowden risked his neck to give us both one last cordial grasp.

"Count on me—on us," cried Clifford, speaking in English, "if you are—troubled!"

By what, my poor Clifford? Can you, with all your gay courage, turn back the hands of the dials? Can you, with all your warm devotion, add one second to the magic second and make it two? The shadows we cast are white.

The train stole out into the night, and I saw them grouped on the platform, silhouettes in the glare of the yellow signals. I drew in my head and shut the window. Sweetheart's face had grown very serious, but now she smiled across from her corner.

"Aren't you coming over by me, Jack?"

VII

We must have been moving very swiftly, for the car rocked and trembled, and it was probably that which awoke me. I looked across at Sweetheart. She was lying on her side, one cheek resting on her side, one cheek resting on her gloved hand, her travelling cap pushed back, her eyes shut. I smoothed away the curly strands of hair which straggled across her cheeks, and tucked another rug well about her feet. Her feet were small as a child's. I speak as if she were not a child. She was eighteen then.

The next time I awoke we lay in a long gaslit station. Some soldiers were disembarking from the forward carriages, and a gendarme stalked up and down the platform.

I looked sleepily about for the name of the station. It was painted in blue over the buffet—"Petit St. Yves." "Is it possible we are in Brittany?" I thought. Then the voices of the station hands, who were hoisting a small boat upon the forward carriage, settled my doubts. "Allons! tire hardiment, Jean Louis! mets le cannotte deboutte."

"Arrête toi Yves! doucement! doucement! Sacré garce!"

Somewhere in the darkness a mellow bell tolled. I settled back to slumber, my eyes on Sweetheart.

She slept.

VIII

I awoke in a flood of brightest sunshine. From our window I could look into the centre of a most enchanting little town, all built of white limestone and granite. The June sunshine slanted on thatched roof and painted gable, and fairly blazed on the little river slipping by under the stone bridge in the square.

The streets and the square were alive with rosy-faced women in white head-dresses. Everywhere the constant motion of blue skirts and spotless coiffes, the twinkle of varnished socks, the clump! clump! of sabots.

Like a black shadow a priest stole across the square. Above him the cross on the church glowed like a live cinder, flashing its reflection along the purple-slated roof from the eaves of which a cloud of ash-gray pigeons drifted into the gutter below. I turned from the window to encounter Sweetheart's eyes. Her lips moved a little, her long lashes heavy with slumber drooped lower, then with a little sigh she sat bolt upright. When I laughed, as I always did, she smiled, a little confused, a little ashamed, murmuring: "Bonjour, mon chéri! Quelle heure est-il?" That was always the way Sweetheart awoke.

"O dear, I am so rumpled!" she said. "Jack, get me the satchel this minute, and don't look at me until I ask you to."

I unlocked the satchel, and then turning to the window again threw it wide open. Oh, how sweet came the morning air from the meadows! Some young fellows below on the bank of the stream were poking long cane fishing-rods under the arches of the bridge.

"Sweetheart," I said over my shoulder, "I believe there are trout in this stream."

"Mr. Elliott says that whenever you see a puddle you always say that," she replied.

"What does he know about it?" I answered, for I am touchy on the subject; "he doesn't know a catfish from a—a dogfish."

"Neither do I, Jack dear, but I'm going to learn. Don't be cross."

She had finished her toilet and came over the window, leaning out over my shoulder.

"Where are we?" she cried in startled wonder at the little white town and the acres of swaying clover. "Oh, Jack, is—is this the country?"

A man in uniform passing under our window looked up surprised.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded; then, seeing Sweetheart, he took off his gold-laced cap, and added, with a bow: "This carriage goes no farther, Monsieur—madame—"

"Merci!" exclaimed Sweetheart, "we wish to go to Quimperlé!"

"And we have tickets for Quimperlé," I insisted.

"But," smiled the official, "this is Quimperlé."

It was true. There was the name written over the end of the station; and, looking ahead, I saw that our car had been detached and was standing in stately seclusion under the freight shed. How long it had been standing so Heaven alone knows: but they evidently had neglected to call us, and there we were inhabiting a detached carriage in the heart of Quimperlé. I managed to get a couple of porters, and presently we found all our traps piled up on the platform, and a lumbering vehicle with a Breton driver waiting to convey us to the hotel.

"Which," said I to the docile Breton, "is the best hotel in Quimperlé?"

"The Hôtel Lion d'Or," he replied.

"How do you know?" I demanded.

"Because," said he mildly, "it is the only hotel in Quimperlé."

Sweetheart observed that this ought to be convincing, even to me, and she tormented me all the way to the square, where I got even by pretending to be horrified at her dishevelled condition incident to a night's railway ride in a stuffy compartment.

"Don't, Jack! people will look at us."

"Let 'em."

"Oh, this is cruel! Oh, I'll pay you for this!"

And they did look at us—or rather at her; for from the time Sweetheart and I had cast our lots together, I noticed that I seemed to escape the observation of passers-by. When I lived alone in Paris I attracted a fair share of observation from the world as it wagged on its Parisian way. It was pleasant to meet a pretty girl's eyes now and then in the throng which flowed through the park and boulevard. I really never flattered myself that it was because of my personal beauty; but in Paris, any young fellow who is dressed in the manner of Albion, hatted and gloved in the same style, is not entirely a cipher. But now it was not the same, by a long shot.

Sweetheart's beauty simply put me in my place as an unnoticed but perhaps correct supplement to her.

She knew she was a beauty, and was delighted when she looked into her mirror. Nothing escaped her. The soft hair threaded with sunshine, which, when loosened, curled to her knees; the clear white forehead and straight brows; the nose delicate and a trifle upturned; the scarlet lips and fine cut chin—she knew the value of each of these. She was pleased with the soft, full curve of her throat, the little ears, and the colour which came and went in her cheeks.

But her eyes were the first thing one noticed. They were the most beautiful gray eyes that ever opened under silken lashes. She approved of my telling her this, which duty I fulfilled daily. Perhaps it may be superfluous to say that we were very much in love. Did I say *were?*

I think that, as I am chanting the graces of Sweetheart, it might not be amiss to say that she is just an inch shorter than I am, and that no Parisienne carried a pretty gown with more perfection than she did. I have seen gowns that looked like the devil on the manikin, but when Sweetheart wore them they were the astonishment and admiration of myself. And I do know when a woman is well dressed, though I am an art critic.

Sweetheart regarded her beauty as an intimate affair between ourselves, a precious gift for our mutual benefit, to be carefully treasured and petted. Her attitude toward the world was unmistakable. The world might look—she was indifferent. With our intimate friends she was above being flattered. Clifford said to me once: "She carries her beauty as a princess would carry the Koh-i-noor—she knows she is worthy of it, and hopes it is worthy of her."

"We ought to be so happy that I am beautiful!" she would say to me. "Just think, supposing I were not!"

I used to try to make her believe that it would have made no difference.

"Oh, not now," she would say gravely. "I know that if I lost it it would be the same to us both, now; but you can't make me believe that, at first, when you used to lean over the terrace of the Luxembourg and wait patiently for hours just to see me walk out of the Odeon."

"I didn't," I would always explain; "I was there by accident."

"Oh, what a funny accident to happen every day for two months!"

"Stop teasing! Of course, after the first week—"

"And what a funny accident that I should pass the same way every day for two months, when before I always went by the Rue de Seine!"

There was once such an accident, and such a girl. I never knew her; she is dead. I wondered sometimes that Sweetheart knew, and believed it was she herself. Yet the other woman's shadow was black.

Sweetheart had a most peculiar and unworldly habit of not embellishing facts. She presently displayed it when we arrived at the Hôtel Lion d'Or.

"Jack," said she nervously, "the cinders have made your face unpleasant. I am ashamed. They may not believe you are my husband."

"As monsieur and madame," I said, "we may have dirty faces and be honest."

"Do you suppose they—they will believe it? These queer people—"

"They'd better!" I said fiercely.

"I—I hadn't thought of that," she said. "You see, in our own little place in Paris everybody knew it, but here—"

I said, "Dearest, what nonsense!" and we marched unceremoniously up to the register, where I wrote our names. Then, with a hasty little squeeze of her gloved hand, she turned to the maid and tripped off to inspect our quarters. While I was pumping the fat-headed old proprietor about the trout fishing in the vicinity, the maid returned with the request that I mount to the room above. I followed her along the tiled passages and found Sweetheart sitting on a trunk.

"It's charming! charming!" she said. "Just look at the roses outside, and the square, and the river! and oh, Jack, the funny little Breton cattle, and the old man with knee-breeches! It's charming! and"—here she caught sight of the enraptured and fascinated maid—"and you are charming, with your red cheeks and white coiffe," she said. "Oh, how pretty!"

"Oh, madame!" murmured the servant in dire confusion.

I said, "Dearest, that will do. Nobody speaks of my peculiar charms, and I wish to be noticed."

The presence of the maid prevented Sweetheart from making amends, so we told her we were satisfied, and we would spare her life if she prepared breakfast in seventeen seconds.

She accepted the gift of existence with a dazed courtsey, and vanished.

It was refreshing to get hold of a sponge and cold water after fourteen hours in a cramped compartment. Hunger drove us to hurry—a thing we rarely did in the morning—and the way we splashed cold water about would have been fatal to any but a tiled floor.

"Dear," I said, "you have not yet seen me in my Tyrolese knickerbockers and beautiful shooting jacket. You have never beheld my legs clothed in Tyrolese stockings, at twenty francs a a pair."

"The legs?" she inquired from the depths of a bath robe.

I ignored the question, and parted my hair with care. Then I sat down on the window and whistled.

Of course I was ready first. Sweetheart's hair had got into a tangle and needed to be all combed out.

"Oh, I know you are impatient, because you're whistling the Chant du Départ," she said from the door of her toilet room.

"As usual," I said, "I am ready first."

"If you say that again—" she threatened.

I said it, and dodged a sponge. Presently I was requested to open the trunk and select a gown for her. Dear little Sweetheart! she loved to pretend that she had so many it needed long consultation to decide which.

"The dark blue?" I inquired.

"Don't you think it is too warm?"

"The pale blue, then—or the pink and white?"

"Why not the white, with the cuffs à l'Anglaise, and the canoe hat?"

I hauled it out.

Then, of course, she changed her mind.

"I think the gray is better for the morning; then I can wear the big chip hat."

I fished up the gray. It was light, almost silvery, and had white spots on it.

"Jack, dear," she said, coming out with her hair tucked up in a knot, drawing the bath robe up to her chin with both hands, "I think that the white cloth would be better, and that I can wear the béret."

By this time the trunk was in a pretty mess, which amused her; but at last I ferreted out the white cloth dress, and, refusing to listen to further discussion, sat down on the window seat. Sweetheart enjoyed it.

"Stop telling me to hurry," she said; "I can't, if you keep saying it all the time."

After a while she called me to fasten her corsage, which hooked with about ten hundred hooks along the side and collar. I hated to do it, and my finger ends stung for hours after, but, as Sweetheart very rightly says, "When we are rich enough to have a maid you needn't," I submitted with an air which delighted her. Her tormenting "Thank you, Jack," was the last straw, so I calmly picked her up and carried her out, and almost to the dining room, where I set her down just in time to avoid the proprietor and three domestics issuing from the office.

Sweetheart was half inclined to laugh, half indignant, and wholly scandalized. But she did not dare say anything, for we were at the dining-room door.

There were some people there, but except for a slight inclination we did not notice each other. We had a small table to ourselves by the rose-bowered window.

We were very hungry. Breakfast began with fresh sardines just caught, and ended with little Breton cakes and a demi-tasse. I finished first; I always do, because the wretched habit of bolting my food, contracted while studying under Bouguereau at Julian's, clings to me yet. Oh, I shall have a merry time paying for it when I am forty! I began, as usual, to tease Sweetheart.

"If you continue to eat like this, dear, you will never be able to wear your new frocks. This one seems a trifle too tight now."

Sweetheart, who prided herself as much on her figure as on her lovely face, repelled the insult with disdain and nibbled her Breton biscuit defiantly. When at last she condescended to rise, we strolled out under the trees in front of the hotel, and sat down on the low stone wall surrounding the garden. The noon sun hung in the zenith, flooding the town with a dazzling downpour. Sunbeams glanced and danced on the water; sunbeams filtered through the foliage; sunbeams stole under Sweetheart's big straw hat, searching the depths of the gray eyes. Sunbeams played merry mischief with my ears and neck, which were beginning to sting in the first sunburn of the year. Through the square the white-coiffed women passed and repassed; small urchins with silver-buckled hatbands roamed about the bridge and market-place until collected and trooped off to school by a black-robed Jesuit frère; and in the shade of the trees a dozen sprawling men in Breton costume smoked their microscopical pipes and watched the water.

"They are an industrious race," said I with fine irony, watching a happy inebriate pursuing a serpentine course toward the café opposite.

Sweetheart, who was as patriotic a little girl as ever hummed the Marseillaise, and adopted France as long as she lived in it, was up in arms in an instant.

"I have read," she said with conviction, "that the Bretons are a brave, industrious race. They are French."

"They speak a different language," I said—"not a word of French in it."

"They are French," repeated Sweetheart, with an inflection which decided me to shun the subject until I could unpack my guide-book.

We sat a little while longer under the trees, until we both began nodding and mutually accused each other. Then Sweetheart went up to the room to take a nap, and I, scorning such weakness, lay down in a steamer chair under our window and fell fast asleep in no time.

I was aroused by a big pink rose which hit me squarely on the mouth. Sweetheart was perched in the window seat above, and as I looked up she sent a shower of blossoms down upon me.

"Jack, you lazy creature, it's five o'clock, and I'm dressed and ready for a walk!"

"So am I," I said, jumping up.

"But not like that. You must come up and make yourself nice for dinner."

"Nice? What's the matter with these tweeds? Aren't these new stockings presentable?"

"Look at your hair!" she said evasively. "Come up this minute and brush it."

I went, and was compelled to climb into a white collar and shirt, and trousers of an English cut. But before we had gone far along the great military road that climbed the heights above the little river, I took Sweetheart's hand in mine and imparted to her my views and intentions upon the subject of my costume for the future.

"You see, dearest, we are here in Brittany for three reasons. The first is, that I should paint outdoors. The second is, that we should economize like the deuce. The third is, our shadows—"

"I know," she interrupted faintly. "Never mind, Jack, dear."

We walked silently for a while, hand clasping hand very tightly, for we were both thinking of the third reason.

I broke the silence first, speaking cheerfully, and she looked up with a quick smile while the shadow fell from her brow.

"You see, dear, in this place, where we are going, there are no people but peasants. Your frocks are all right for a place like this; we must both wear our free-and-easy togs—I for painting, and you for scrambling about after your wild flowers or fishing with me. If you get tired of seeing me in corduroys or tweeds, I'll dress for you when you think you can't stand it any longer."

"Oh, Jack, I do like your knickerbockers—"

"And you shall wear your most gorgeous gown for me—"

"Indeed I won't," she laughed, adding impulsively, "indeed I will—every day, if you wish it!"

At the top of the hill stood an ancient Ursuline convent surrounded by a high wall, which also inclosed the broad acres of the wealthy sisterhood. We sat down by the roadside hedge and looked across to the valley, where the hurrying river had ceased to hasten and now lingered in placid pools and long, deep reaches. The sun had set behind the forest, and the sky threw a purple light over woods and meadow. The grassy pools below were swept by flocks of whistling martins and swallows. One or two white gulls flapped slowly toward the tide water below, and a young curlew, speeding high overhead, uttered a lonesome cry. The grass—the brilliant green grass of Brittany—had turned a deep metallic blue in the twilight. A pale primrose light grew and died in the sky, and the forest changed from rose to ashes. Then a dull red bar shot across the parting clouds in the west, the forest smouldered an instant, and the pools glowed crimson. Slowly the red bar melted away, the light died out among the branches, the pools turned sombre. Looking up, we saw the new moon flashing in the sky above our heads. Sweetheart sighed in perfect contentment.

"It's beautiful!" I said, with another sigh.

"Ah, yes," she murmured, "beautiful to you, and to me—to me, Jack, who have never before seen this land of Morbihan."

After a while she said, "And the ocean—oh, how I long to see it! Is it near us, Jack?"

"The river runs into it twenty kilometres below. We feel the tide at Quimperlé." I did not add, "Baedeker."

"I wonder," I said presently, "what are the feelings of a little American who sees this country—the real country—for the first time?"

"I suppose you mean me," she said. "I don't know—I don't think I understand it yet, but I know I shall love it, and never want to go back."

"Perhaps we never shall," I said. "The magic second may stretch into years that end at last as all ends."

Then our hands met in that sudden nervous clasp which seemed to help and steady us when we were thinking of the real world, so long, so long forgotten.

IX

I was awakened next morning by a spongeful of cold water in the face, which I hate. I started up to wreak vengeance upon Sweetheart, but she fled to the toilet room and locked herself in. From this retreat she taunted me until further sleep was out of the question, and I bowed to the inevitable—indignantly, when I saw my watch pointed to five o'clock.

Sweetheart was perfectly possessed to row; so when I had bolted my coffee and sat watching her placidly sip hers, we decided to go down to the bank of the little stream and hire a boat. The boat was a wretched, shapeless affair, with two enormous oars and the remnants of rowlocks. It was the best boat in town, so we took it. I managed to get away from the bank, and, conscious of Sweetheart's open admiration, pulled boldly down the stream. It was easy work, for the tide was ebbing. The river up to the bridge was tidal, but above the bridge it leaped and flowed, a regular salmon stream. Sweetheart was so impatient to take the oars that I relinquished them and picked up my rod. The boat swung down the stream and under the high stone viaduct, where I insisted on anchoring and whipping the promising-looking water. The water was likely enough, and the sudden splash of a leaping grilse added to its likelihood. I was in hopes a grilse might become entangled with one of the flies, but though a big one shot up out of the water within five feet of Sweetheart, causing her to utter a suppressed scream, neither grilse nor trout rose to the beautiful lures I trailed about, and I only hooked two or three enormous dace, which came up like logs and covered the bottom of the boat with their coarse scales.

Sweetheart had never seen a French trout uncooked, and scarcely shared my disappointment.

"They are splendid fish," she repeated; "you are unreasonable."

There was an ancient Breton squatting on the bank; from his sulky attitude I took him to be a poacher visiting his infernal set lines and snares; but I hailed him pleasantly with a bonjour, which he returned civilly enough.

"Are there trout in this stream?"

"About the bridge," he replied cautiously.

"Have you caught any?"

"I ain't fishing," he said, much alarmed.

"What's that?" I demanded, pointing to as plump a trout as ever I saw, floating on the end of a string under the bank.

"Where?" he asked, looking about him with affected concern.

"There!"

He looked around, everywhere except where I pointed. He examined the horizon, and the tree tops, as though he expected a fish on every twig. I poled the boat up to the bank and pointed out the fish.

"Ma doui!" he exclaimed, "there *is* a fish!"

"Yes, a trout," I said.

"Trout?" He burst into a forced laugh. "Trout! Ha! Ha! Why, monsieur, that is a dace—a poor little dace!" He hastily jerked it up with a long home-made gaff which lay—of course quite by accident—at his feet.

"A poor little dace!" he mumbled. "Of course, monsieur would not care to claim such a poor, coarse little fish; but I am only too glad to eat it—ah, yes, only too glad!"

"You see," said Sweetheart impulsively, "that you are wrong. Give him our fish; that will make four dace for the poor fellow."

I placed the three dace across the blade of my oar and held it out to the poacher. He took them as if he were really glad to get them. Then I said, "These are dace, and they don't have red spots."

He stood as if ready to bolt, but I laughed, and settled back on my oars, saying: "You're a poacher; but I don't care a continental, and you can poach all day in this confounded country, where there is about one trout to the kilometre. Don't look scared. What do I care? Only don't tell me I'm unable to distinguish a trout when I can see the tip of his nose."

I then sailed majestically out into the stream.

Sweetheart wanted to know whether that was really a real poacher. She had read about them. Her ideal poacher was a young, stalwart, eagle-eyed giant, with a tangle of hair and a disposition toward assassination. The reality shocked her.

"Anyway," she said, "you frightened the poor old thing. How rough men are!"

We returned to the landing place with difficulty, for the tide was still on the ebb, and we got aground more than once. My hands were in a fine condition when at last I drove that wretched scow into the mud and lifted Sweetheart out to the firm bank. The evil-eyed old man who rented us the boat glanced sardonically at my rod and blistered hands, and I was glad enough to pay him all he asked and break away for the hotel.

We had an hour to lunch in, pack, and be ready for the trap which was to bear us to our destination—the distant village of Faöuet, in Morbihan.

X

A long drive on a smooth white road, acres of gorse and broom, beech woods and oak thickets, and the "Heu! heu! Allo! Allons! en route!" of the Breton driver, these are my recollections of the ride to Faöuet. There are others, too—the hedges heavy with bloom, the perfume of the wild honeysuckle, the continual bird chorus from every grove and every bramble patch—and Sweetheart's veil flying into my face.

We have spoken of it since together, but she has few recollections of that journey. She only remembers it as her first steps into our heritage.

And so we entered into our heritage, Sweetheart and I; and our heritage was very fair, for it lay everywhere about us. It was a world which we alone inhabited. Men said, "This land is Gloanec's," "This is Gurnalec's," "This is Kerdec's"; they spoke of "my woods" and "his meadows" and "their pastures." And how we laughed; for when we passed together through their lands, around us, far as the eye could reach, our heritage lay in the sunshine.

XI

One day, when Sweetheart had been weeping—for we were thinking of the end to the magic second—I spoke of our heritage which swept far as the eye could reach across the moors of Faöuet.

She said: "The past is ours, Jack; the present is ours; the future—"

We tried to smile, but our hearts were like lead. Yet we know that the future will also be ours. I know it as I write.

XII

The letter from St. Gildas, bringing with it a breath of salt air, lay on the table before us. Sweetheart clasped her hands and looked at me.

"I'm in favour of going at once," I said for the third time. Over by the wall were piled my canvases, the result of three months in Faöuet.

The first was a study of Sweetheart under the trees of the ancient orchard in the convent grounds. What trouble I had had with that canvas! I remembered the morning that the old gardener came over and stood behind me as I painted; and when I had replied to his "Good-morning," I recalled the pang his next words gave me:

"I am so sorry, monsieur, but it is forbidden to enter the convent grounds."

My canvas was almost finished, and, as the great romancers have it, "my despair was great!" A month's work for nothing—or next to nothing!

Sweetheart rose from her pose on the low bough of the apple tree and came over to my side. "Never mind, Jack; I shall go and ask the Mother Superior about it."

I knew that she would win over the Mother Superior; and when, that evening, she came back radiant, crying, "She is lovely!—she says you may finish the picture, and I think you ought to go and thank her," I put on my cap, and stepping across the street, we rang at the gate.

The old gardener let us in, and in a moment I stood before the latticed windows behind which some one was moving. In a low voice the invisible nun told us that the Superior granted to us the privilege of working in the orchard, but we must be careful of the grass, because it was almost time to cut it.

"I am sure we may have confidence in you," she said.

"We will not trample the grass, my sister, and I thank you for us both."

The lattice trembled, was raised a little, and then fell.

"You are English," said the hidden nun.

"I am American, my sister."

I looked at the lattice a moment, then dropped my eyes. I may have been mistaken, but I think she sighed.

Sweetheart came closer to the lattice and murmured her thanks.

There was a pause.

Then came the voice again, sweet and gentle: "May Our Lady of Saint Gildas protect you"; and we went out by the little iron wicket.

The next picture was another study of Sweetheart in the woods; the next, another study of Sweetheart; and the others were studies of the same young lady.

The light in the room had grown dim, and I walked to the window which overlooked the convent chapel. The chapel windows were open; within, the nuns stood or knelt chanting. Three white-veiled figures were advancing to the altar, and the others, draped in black, now knelt behind. I didn't think I had any business to look at them, so I did not. After all, they were cloistered nuns, and it was only on hot nights that they opened the chapel windows. Sweetheart was speaking beside my shoulder.

"Poor things! The ones in white, they are the novices; they will never see parents or friends again. When they enter the gates they never leave—never; they are buried there."

I said: "After all, we are much like them. We have left all; we have nothing now but each other, for the world is dead, and we are bound by vows which keep us within the narrow confines of our heritage."

"But our heritage is everywhere—as far as we can see."

"Ah, yes, but we can only see to the horizon. There is a world beyond."

"I have renounced it," said Sweetheart faintly.

XIII

The letter from St. Gildas had been lying on our table for a week before I thought of answering it, and even then it was Sweetheart who wrote:

> "Dear Mr. Stuart:
>
> "Jack is too lazy to answer your kind note, so, in pure shame for his discourtesy, I hasten to reply to your questions.

> "First: Yes; we have been working very hard, and Jack's pictures are charming, though he growls over them all day.
>
> "Second: Yes; we intend to stay in Brittany this winter for lots of reasons—one being economy, and another, Jack's outdoor painting.
>
> "Third: Yes; we are coming to St. Gildas.
>
> "Fourth: To-morrow.
>
> "Fifth: No; we had not heard of Mr. Clifford's affair with the policeman; and oh, I am so sorry he was locked up and fined! Jack laughs. I suspect he, too, was as wicked as you all when he was a student, alone in Paris.
>
> "Sixth: I know you are Jack's oldest and most intimate friend, so I allow you more liberty than I do Messieurs Clifford and Elliott; therefore I will answer your question as to whether the honeymoon is not on the wane. No! no! no! There are three answers to one question. See how generous I can be!"

Sweetheart called me to see whether or not I approved. I did, and added my answer to Stuart's last question as follows: "No, you idiot!" Then I signed the note, and Sweetheart sealed and directed it.

So we left for St. Gildas next morning before sunrise and in the rain. This leaving at such an unearthly hour was not my doing, but Sweetheart was determined, and rose by candlelight in spite of desperate opposition on my part. It was cold, and the rain beat against the windows.

It was many kilometres to St. Gildas, but before we had gone six, the rain had ceased and the eastern sky flushed to a pale rose.

"Thank goodness!" I said, "we shall have the sun."

Then the daily repeated miracle of the coming of dawn was wrought before our eyes. The heavens glowed in rainbow tints; the shredded mist rising along the river was touched with purple and gold, and acres of meadow and pasture dripped precious stones. Shreds of the fading night-mist drifted among the tree tops, now tipped with fire, while in the forest depths faint sparkles came from some lost ray of morning light falling on wet leaves. Then of a sudden up shot the sun, and against it, black and gigantic, a peasant towered, leaning upon his spade.

XIV

We were fast nearing the end of our long journey. The sun blazed on us from the zenith, and the wheels creaked with the heat of the white road. The driver leaned back, saying, "We enter Finistère here by this granite post." Presently he added, "The ocean!"

There it lay, a basin of silver and blue. Sweetheart had started to her feet, speechless, one hand holding to my shoulder, the other clasped to her breast. And now, as the road wound through the hills and down to the coast, long stretches of white sand skirted the distant cliffs, and over the cliffs waved miles and miles of yellow gorse. A cluster of white and gray houses lay in the hollow to the left almost at the mouth of the river, and beyond, the waves were beating in the bar—beating the same rhythm which we were to hear so long there together, day and night. There was not a boat to be seen, not a creature, nor was there any sign of life save for the smoke curling from a cottage chimney below. The ocean lay sparkling beneath, and beyond its deeper blue melted into the haze on the horizon.

Suddenly, in the road below, the figure of a man appeared, and at the same moment a pointer pup came gambolling up beside us in an ecstasy of self-abnegation and apology. I sprang out of the lumbering vehicle and lifted Sweetheart to the ground, and in an instant we were shaking hands with a stalwart young fellow in knickerbockers and jersey, who said we were a pretty pair not to have come sooner, and told Sweetheart he pitied her lot—meaning me.

Then we walked arm in arm down a fragrant lane to the river bank, where the dearest old lady toddled out of the granite house to welcome us and show us our rooms. Sweetheart went with her, while I stopped an instant to chat with Stuart.

"That is Madame Ylven," he said. "She is the most stunning peasant woman in Finistère, and you will want for nothing." Then, after a moment, "Good heavens! Jack, what a beauty your wife—" He stopped short, but added, "What a delicious little beauty Sweetheart has grown to be!"

A white-coiffed maid came to the door, and said, "Will monsieur have the goodness to come? Madame wishes him to see the rooms."

The wind blew from the south, and the thunder of the sea was in my ears as I mounted the stairs to our new quarters.

Sweetheart met me at the door, saying, "It seems almost too much happiness to bear, but I feel that we are at home at last—alone together for all time."

Alone together? The ocean at our threshold, the moors and forests at our back, and a good slate roof above us. Before me through the open door I could see the great old-fashioned room, warm in the afternoon sunlight—the room we were to live in so long, the room in which we were to pass the happiest and bitterest moments of our lives.

She hesitated an instant before the threshold. I think we knew that we stood upon the threshold of our destiny. Then I said, half in earnest: "Are you afraid to cross with me into the unknown future? See, the room is filled with sunshine. Are you afraid?"

She sprang across the threshold, and, turning to me, held out both hands.

XV

The sun slipped lower and lower into the sea, until a distant tossing wave washed it out against the sky. Light died in the room, and shadows closed around us; yet it was in the darkness and shadows that we drew nearer to each other, then and after.

XVI

Stuart stood under our window and yelled up at me, "Oh, Jack! I say, Jack!"

Sweetheart, who was fussing over the half-unpacked trunk, went to the window and threw open the panes.

"You don't mean to say you have had your coffee?" she said. "Jack isn't up yet."

"Jack is up," I explained, coming to the window in pajamas. "Hello!"

"I only wanted to say that I haven't had my coffee," he explained, "and I'm going to take it with you when you're ready."

Sweetheart picked up her béret, and, passing a hatpin through it, turned to me with a warning, "I shall eat all the breakfast, monsieur!" and vanished down the stairs. A moment later I heard her clear voice below:

Sonnez le choeur,
Chasseur!
Sonnez la mort!

Before I had finished dressing, Sweetheart tripped in with my coffee and toast.

"Of course I've finished," she said, "and you don't deserve this. Mr. Stuart has gone off with his canvases, and says he'll see you at lunch."

I swallowed the coffee and browsed on little squares of toast which she condescendingly buttered for me, and then, lighting a cigarette, I announced my intention of commanding an exploring expedition consisting of Sweetheart and myself. A scratching at the door and a patter of feet announced that I had been overheard.

Sweetheart unlatched the door, and the pointer pup of the evening before charged into the room and covered us with boisterous caresses, which we took to indicate that he not only approved of the expedition, but intended to undertake the general supervision of it himself. I resigned the leadership at once.

"His name," said Sweetheart in the tone of one who presents a distinguished guest, "is 'Luff.'"

I gravely acknowledged the honour by patting his head.

"I'm afraid," I said to Sweetheart, "that there is a bar sinister upon his escutcheon, but possibly it is only the indelible mark of the conquering British foxhound."

Sweetheart said, "Nonsense!" and the expedition moved, Luff leading with a series of ear-splitting orders in the dog language which we perfectly understood.

In ten minutes we stood on the cliffs, the salt wind whipping our faces. Saint-Gildas-des-Prés lay at our feet.

"I know," observed Sweetheart calmly, "all about this place. Captain Ylven told me at breakfast."

"Well," said I, "what's that island on the horizon?"

Then she overwhelmed me with erudition, until I longed for Baedeker and revenge.

"That is the Isle de Groix, and all about us is the Bay of Biscay. This little hamlet on the cliff is St. Julien, and if we follow the coast far enough we come to Lorient."

"Follow the coast? Which way?"

Sweetheart had forgotten, and I triumphed in silence, until she stamped her foot and marched off to assist Luff in investigating a suspicious hole in the cliff.

I went to the edge of the plateau and looked over. The surf thundered against the rocks, tossing long strands of seaweed over the pebbly beach. A man with a wooden rake stood in the water up to his knees. He raked the seaweed from the breakers as a farmer rakes weeds from the lawn. The salt wind began to sting my lips and eyes. My throat felt dry and salty. I turned toward the hamlet of St. Gildas. I had not imagined it so small. Besides our house there were but three others clustered under the river bank. Behind it stretched woods and grain fields broken by patches of yellow gorse. Across the river stood a stone chapel almost lost in the miles of moorland. To the east and west the downs covered with gorse and heather rolled to the horizon. Here and there along the cliffs stood what appeared to be the ruins of ancient forts, and on a rock, just where the river sweeps out into the sea, rose a dirty white signal tower. The tower was low and squatty and wet. It looked like some saline excrescence which had slowly exuded from the brine-soaked rock. On the bar hundreds of white gulls rose and settled as the tide encroached; curlew were running along the foam-splashed shore under the eastern cliffs across the river.

On our side of the river the cliffs were covered with blackthorn and hawthorn, with here and there a stunted oak, probably so placed by Providence as general rendezvous for all the small twittering birds of Finistère. Birds were everywhere. From the clouds came the ceaseless carol of skylarks; from the grain fields and the flowering gorse rose an unbroken chorus, taken up and repeated by flocks of microscopical songsters among the blackthorns on the cliffs.

"This is paradise, this wilderness," I thought.

Then, as I heard Sweetheart's mocking voice from the cliff:

O frère Jaques,
Dormez vous!

"I'm not asleep!" I cried in answer. "What is it?"

"Luff has unearthed a poor little mole, but I won't allow him to hurt it."

"Jack, dear," she said, as I came up, "couldn't we keep it as a pet? See, the poor little thing is blind."

As it was blind we called it "Love," which later was changed to "Cupid," and finally, when we discovered its true gormandizing character, from "Cupid" we substituted "Cupidity," by which name it flourished and fattened.

"What a change," said Sweetheart sadly, "from Blind Love to Blind Greed!"

The mole grew very fat.

XVII

When the winds stir the leaves among the poplars, and the long shadows fall athwart the fields; when the winds rise at night, and the branches scrape and crack above the moonlit snow; when in the long hot days the earth is bathed in fragrance, and all the little creatures of the fields are silent; when in the still evenings the flowers perfume the air, and the gravel walks shine white in the moonlight; when the breezes quicken from the distant coast; when the sand shakes beneath the shock of the breakers, and every wave is plumed with white; when the calm eye of the beacon turns to mine, lingers, and turns away, and the surf is yeasty and thick; when I start at the sound of a voice from the cliffs, and my eyes are raised in vain; when the white gulls toss and drift in the storm-clouds, and the water hurries out in the black ebb tide; when I rise and look from the window; when I dress; when I work with pen and colour; when I rest; when I walk; when I sleep—there is one face before my eyes, one name on my lips. For the white shadow is turning gray, and God alone knows the end.

XVIII

And God alone knows the end, for the mists are crowding, brooding like angry-browed clouds, and I hear the whistle of unseen winds, and my life-flame wavers and sinks and flares, blown hither and thither, tossing, fading, leaping, but fading, always fading.

In a flash, like a printed picture on a screen, illuminated, keenly etched in the white glare, I see the bed, and the people around me, the black gowns, the pale eyes of the doctor, the sponge and basin, the rolls of lint.

Voices, minute but clean-cut and clear as picked harp-strings, tinkle in my ears; the voice of the doctor, other voices, but always the voice of the doctor—"The splinter of bone on the brain; the splinter pressing on the tissues; the depression."

The doctor! That is the man! That is the man who comes to my side, who follows, follows where I go, who seeks me throughout the world! I saw him as I lay flung on the turf, limp, unconscious, below the cliffs on the Aspen hills; I felt his presence in the studio; I heard him creeping at my heels across the gorse thickets of St. Gildas. And now he has come to cut short the magic second, to turn back time—back, back, into the old worn channels, rock-ribbed and salt with tears.

As a leaf of written paper torn in two, so shall my life be torn in two; and the long tear shall mangle the chapter written in rose and gold.

Then, too, my shadow, already turned from white to gray, shall fall with a deeper stain wherever I pass; and I shall see the yellow gorse glimmer and turn to golden-rod, and the poplars turn to oaks; and the twin towers of Notre Dame, filmy, lace-carved, and gray with centuries, shall dwindle as I look—dwindle and sway and turn to pines, singing pines that murmur to the winds, blowing across the Aspen hills.

* * *

All that is fair shall pass away; all that I love, all that I fear for—these shall the doctor take away, lifting them from my memory on the point of a steel blade. What has he to give in return? A hell of vapour, distorting sight; a hell of sound, drowning the soul.

* * *

Gigantic apparitions arise across the world of water, wavering like shadows on the clouds. Steel-clad, clothed in skins, casqued in steel, their winged heads bend and nod and move against the clouds. And even they are changing as clouds change shape. I see steel limbs turn red and naked. I see winged casques trail to the earth, feathered, painted in colours of earth.

Ihó! Inâh! Etó! E-hó!

The bridge of stars spans the vast lake of air; the sun and the moon travel over it.

* * *

My shadow is turning dark; I can scarcely see the doctor, but now—God have mercy!—*I can touch him.*

* * *

All the high spectres are stooping from the clouds, bending above me to watch. I know them and their eyes of shadow—I know them now; Hârpen that was to Chaske what Hárpstinà shall be to Hapéda; and Hârka shall come after all with the voice of winter winds:

"Aké u, aké u, aké u!"

But the magic second shall never return.

"Mâ cânté maséca!"

* * *

Now they leave my bed, the people who crowded there under the shadowy forms of the spectres; now the doctor bends over; I see and feel him. His hands are tangled in the threads of time; he is cutting a thread; he—

XIX

When I spoke to him first I spoke in the French language. Before he answered, the scream of a blue jay in the elms outside set my nerves aquiver, and I called for Donald and Walter.

As I lay there I could see the Aspen hills from the window, heaps of crumpled gold bathed in sunshine. Over them sailed the froth from the silken milkweed; over them drifted the big brown-red butterflies, luminous as richest autumn leaves.

Some one closed the door softly. The doctor had gone.

The sunlight poured into the window, etching my shadow on the wall behind. Lying very still there I saw it motionless beside me. *The shadow was black.*

Somebody said in the next room, "Will he die?"

"Die?" I said aloud.

A bird twittered outside my window.

The door opened again, noiselessly.

"Sweetheart?" I whispered.

"Yes, Jack."

After a moment I said, "When do you go back to school?"

"I? I finished school a year ago."

"Come nearer."

"I am here, Jack."

"Time stopped a year ago."

"A year ago to-day."

The same gray eyes, the same face, paler, perhaps.

"We have journeyed far," I sighed, "always together, but in those days our shadows were white as snow. Am I going to die? There are tears in your eyes."

They fell on my cheek; her arms fell too, closer, closer, around my neck.

"Life has begun," she said.

"Life? What was the year that ends to-day? The magic second of life?"

"A year of death, to me!"

Ah, but her soul knows of a life in death! And she shall know it, too, when her shadow turns whiter than snow. For the Temple of Idols has closed its doors at the sound of a voice, and an idol of gilt has turned to flesh and blood.

I-hó!

So shall she know of the life in death when her soul and her body are one. ❋

Passeur

O friends, I've served ye food and bed;
O friends, the mist is rising wet;
Then bide a moment, O my dead,
Where, lonely, I must linger yet!

Because man goeth to his long home,
And the mourners go about the streets.

When he had finished his pipe he tapped the brier bowl against the chimney until the ashes powdered the charred log smouldering across the andirons. Then he sank back in his chair, absently touching the hot pipe-bowl with the tip of each finger until it grew cool enough to be dropped into his coat pocket.

Twice he raised his eyes to the little American clock ticking upon the mantel. He had half an hour to wait.

The three candles that lighted the room might be trimmed to advantage; this would give him something to do. A pair of scissors lay open upon the bureau, and he rose and picked them up. For a while he stood dreamily shutting and opening the scissors, his eyes roaming about the room. There was an easel in the corner, and a pile of dusty canvases behind it; behind the canvases there was a shadow—that gray, menacing shadow that never moved.

When he had trimmed each candle he wiped the smoky scissors on a paint rag and flung them on the bureau again. The clock pointed to ten; he had been occupied exactly three minutes.

The bureau was littered with neckties, pipes, combs and brushes, matches, reels and fly-books, collars, shirt studs, a new pair of Scotch shooting stockings, and a woman's workbasket.

He picked out all the neckties, folded them once, and hung them over a bit of twine that stretched across the looking-glass; the shirt studs he shovelled into the top drawer along with brushes, combs, and stockings; the reels and fly-books he dusted with his handkerchief and placed methodically along the mantel shelf. Twice he stretched out his hand toward the woman's workbasket, but his hand fell to his side again, and he turned away into the room staring at the dying fire.

Outside the snow-sealed window a shutter broke loose and banged monotonously, until he flung open the panes and fastened it. The soft, wet snow, that had choked the window-panes all day, was frozen hard now, and he had to break the polished crust before he could find the rusty shutter hinge.

He leaned out for a moment, his numbed hands resting on the snow, the roar of a rising snow-squall in his ears; and out across the desolate garden and stark hedgerow he saw the flat black river spreading through the gloom.

A candle sputtered and snapped behind him; a sheet of drawing-paper fluttered across the floor, and he closed the panes and turned back into the room, both hands in his worn pockets.

The little American clock on the mantel ticked and ticked, but the hands lagged, for he had not been occupied five minutes in all. He went up to the mantel and watched the hands of the clock. A minute—longer than a year to him—crept by.

Around the room the furniture stood ranged—a chair or two of yellow pine, a table, the easel, and in one corner the broad curtained bed; and behind each lay shadows, menacing shadows that never moved.

A little pale flame started up from the smoking log on the andirons; the room sang with the sudden hiss of escaping wood gases. After a little the back of the log caught fire; jets of blue flared up here and there with mellow sounds like the lighting of gas-burners in a row, and in a moment a thin sheet of yellow flame wrapped the whole charred log.

Then the shadows moved; not the shadows behind the furniture—they never moved—but other shadows, thin, gray, confusing, that came and spread their slim patterns all around him, and trembled and trembled.

He dared not step or tread upon them, they were too real; they meshed the floor around his feet, they ensnared his knees, they fell across his breast like ropes. Some night, in the silence of the moors, when wind and river were still, he feared these strands of shadow might tighten—creep higher around his throat and tighten. But even then he knew that those other shadows would never move, those gray shapes that knelt crouching in every corner.

When he looked up at the clock again ten minutes had straggled past. Time was disturbed in the room; the strands of shadow seemed entangled among the hands of the clock, dragging them back from their rotation. He wondered if the shadows would strangle Time, some still night when the wind and the flat river were silent.

There grew a sudden chill across the floor; the cracks of the boards let it in. He leaned down and drew his sabots toward him from their place near the andirons, and slipped them over his chaussons; and as he straightened up, his eyes mechanically sought the mantel above, where in the dusk another pair of sabots stood, little, slender, delicate sabots, carved from red beech. A year's dust grayed their surface; a year's rust dulled the silver band across the instep. He said this to himself aloud, knowing that it was within a few minutes of the year.

His own sabots came from Mort-Dieu; they were shaved square and banded with steel. But in days past he had thought that no sabot in Mort-Dieu was delicate enough to touch the instep of the Mort-Dieu passeur. So he sent to the shore lighthouse, and they sent to Lorient, where the women are coquettish and show their hair under the coiffe, and wear dainty sabots; and in this town, where vanity corrupts and there is much lace on coiffe and collarette, a pair of delicate sabots was found, banded with silver and chiselled in red beech. The sabots stood on the mantel above the fire now, dusty and tarnished.

There was a sound from the window, the soft murmur of snow blotting glass panes. The wind, too, muttered under the roof eaves. Presently it would begin to whisper to him from the chimney—he knew it—and he held his hands over his ears and stared at the clock.

In the hamlet of Mort-Dieu the pines sing all day of the sea secrets, but in the night the ghosts of little gray birds fill the branches, singing of the sunshine of past years. He heard the song as he sat, and he crushed his hands over his ears; but the gray birds joined with the wind in the chimney, and he heard all that he dared not hear, and he thought all that he dared not hope or think, and the swift tears scalded his eyes.

In Mort-Dieu the nights are longer than anywhere on earth; he knew it—why should he not know? This had been so for a year; it was different before. There were so many things different before; days and nights vanished like minutes then; the pines told no secrets of the sea, and the gray birds had not yet come to Mort-Dieu. Also, there was Jeanne, passeur at the Carmes.

When he first saw her she was poling the square, flat-bottomed ferry skiff from the Carmes to Mort-Dieu, a red handkerchief bound across her silky black hair, a red skirt fluttering just below her knees. The next time he saw her he had to call to her across the placid river, "Ohé! Ohé, passeur!" She came, poling the flat skiff, her deep blue eyes fixed pensively on him, the scarlet skirt and kerchief idly flapping in the April wind. Then day followed day when the far call "Passeur!" grew clearer and more joyous, and the faint answering cry, "I come!" rippled across the water like music tinged with laughter. Then spring came, and with spring came love—love, carried free across the ferry from the Carmes to Mort-Dieu.

The flame above the charred log whistled, flickered, and went out in a jet of wood vapour, only to play like lightning above the gas and relight again. The clock ticked more loudly, and the song from the pines filled the room. But in his straining eyes a summer landscape was reflected, where white clouds sailed and white foam curled under the square bow of a little skiff. And he pressed his numbed hands tighter to his ears to drown the cry, "Passeur! Passeur!"

And now for a moment the clock ceased ticking. It was time to go—who but he should know it, he who went out into the night swinging his lantern? And he went. He had gone each night from the first—from that first strange winter evening when a strange voice had answered him across the river, the voice of the new passeur. He had never heard *her* voice again.

So he passed down the windy wooden stairs, lantern hanging lighted in his hand, and stepped out into the storm. Through sheets of drifting snow, over heaps of frozen seaweed and icy drift he moved, shifting his lantern right and left, until its glimmer on the water warned him. Then he called out into the night, "Passeur!" The frozen spray spattered his face and crusted the lantern; he heard the distant boom of breakers beyond the bar, and the noise of mighty winds among the seaward cliffs.

"Passeur!"

Across the broad flat river, black as a sea of pitch, a tiny light sparkled a moment. Again he cried, "Passeur!"

"I come!"

He turned ghastly white, for it was her voice—or was he crazy?—and he sprang waist deep into the icy current and cried out again, but his voice ended in a sob.

Slowly through the snow the flat skiff took shape, creeping nearer and nearer. But she was not at the pole—he saw that; there was only a tall, thin man, shrouded to the eyes in oilskin; and he leaped into the boat and bade the ferryman hasten.

Halfway across he rose in the skiff, and called, "Jeanne!" But the roar of the storm and the thrashing of icy waves drowned his voice. Yet he heard her again, and she called to him by name.

When at last the boat grated upon the invisible shore, he lifted his lantern, trembling, stumbling among the rocks, and calling to her, as though his voice could silence the voice that had spoken a year ago that night. And it could not. He sank shivering upon his knees, and looked out into the darkness, where an ocean rolled across a world. Then his stiff lips moved, and he repeated her name; but the hand of the ferryman fell gently upon his head.

And when he raised his eyes he saw that the ferryman was Death. ❋

The Key to Grief

The moving finger writes, and, having writ,
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.
FITZGERALD.

The wild hawk to the wind-swept sky
The deer to the wholesome wold,
And the heart of a man to the heart of a maid,
As it was in the days of old.
KIPLING.

I

They were doing their work very badly. They got the rope around his neck, and tied his wrists with moose-bush withes, but again he fell, sprawling, turning, twisting over the leaves, tearing up everything around him like a trapped panther.

He got the rope away from them; he clung to it with bleeding fists; he set his white teeth in it, until the jute strands relaxed, unravelled, and snapped, gnawed through by his white teeth.

Twice Tully struck him with a gum hook. The dull blows fell on flesh rigid as stone.

Panting, foul with forest mould and rotten leaves, hands and face smeared with blood, he sat up on the ground, glaring at the circle of men around him.

"Shoot him!" gasped Tully, dashing the sweat from his bronzed brow; and Bates, breathing heavily, sat down on a log and dragged a revolver from his rear pocket. The man on the ground watched him; there was froth in the corners of his mouth.

"Git back!" whispered Bates, but his voice and hand trembled. "Kent," he stammered, "won't ye hang?"

The man on the ground glared.

"Ye've got to die, Kent," he urged; "they all say so. Ask Lefty Sawyer; ask Dyce; ask Carrots.—He's got to swing fur it—ain't he, Tully?—Kent, fur God's sake, swing fur these here gents!"

The man on the ground panted; his bright eyes never moved.

After a moment Tully sprang on him again. There was a flurry of leaves, a crackle, a gasp and a grunt, then the thumping and thrashing of two bodies writhing in the brush. Dyce and Carrots jumped on the prostrate men. Lefty Sawyer caught the rope again, but the jute strands gave way and he stumbled. Tully began to scream, "He's chokin' me!" Dyce staggered out into the open, moaning over a broken wrist.

"Shoot!" shouted Lefty Sawyer, and dragged Tully aside. "Shoot, Jim Bates! Shoot straight, b' God!"

"Git back!" gasped Bates, rising from the falling log.

The crowd parted right and left; a quick report rang out—another—another. Then from the whirl of smoke a tall form staggered, dealing blows—blows that sounded sharp as the crack of a whip.

"He's off! Shoot straight!" they cried.

There was a gallop of heavy boots in the woods. Bates, faint and dazed, turned his head.

"Shoot!" shrieked Tully.

But Bates was sick; his smoking revolver fell to the ground; his white face and pale eyes contracted. It lasted only a moment; he started after the others, plunging, wallowing through thickets of osier and hemlock underbrush.

Far ahead he heard Kent crashing on like a young moose in November, and he knew he was making for the shore. The others knew too. Already the gray gleam of the sea cut a straight line along the forest edge; already the soft clash of the surf on the rocks broke faintly through the forest silence.

"He's got a canoe there!" bawled Tully. "He'll be into it!"

And he was into it, kneeling in the bow, driving his paddle to the handle. The rising sun gleamed like red lightning on the flashing blade; the canoe shot to the crest of a wave, hung, bows dripping in the wind, dropped into the depths, glided, tipped, rolled, shot up again, staggered, and plunged on.

Tully ran straight out into the cove surf; the water broke against his chest, bare and wet with sweat. Bates sat down on a worn black rock and watched the canoe listlessly.

The canoe dwindled to a speck of gray and silver; and when Carrots, who had run back to the gum camp for a rifle, returned, the speck on the water might have been easier to hit than a loon's head at twilight. So Carrots, being thrifty by nature, fired once, and was satisfied to save the other cartridges. The canoe was still visible, making for the open sea. Somewhere beyond the horizon lay the keys, a string of rocks bare as skulls, black and slimy where the sea cut their base, white on the crests with the excrement of sea birds.

"He's makin' fur the Key to Grief!" whispered Bates to Dyce.

Dyce, moaning, and nursing his broken wrist, turned a sick face out to sea.

The last rock seaward was the Key to Grief, a splintered pinnacle polished by the sea. From the Key to Grief, seaward a day's paddle, if a man dared, lay the long wooded island in the ocean known as Grief on the charts of the bleak coast.

In the history of the coast, two men had made the voyage to the Key to Grief, and from there to the island. One of these was a rum-crazed pelt hunter, who lived to come back; the other was a college youth; they found his battered canoe at sea, and a day later his battered body was flung up in the cove.

So, when Bates whispered to Dyce, and when Dyce called to the others, they knew that the end was not far off for Kent and his canoe; and they turned away into the forest, sullen, but satisfied that Kent would get his dues when the devil got his.

Lefty spoke vaguely of the wages of sin. Carrots, with an eye to thrift, suggested a plan for an equitable division of Kent's property.

When they reached the gum camp they piled Kent's personal effects on a blanket.

Carrots took the inventory: a revolver, two gum hooks, a fur cap, a nickel-plated watch, a pipe, a pack of new cards, a gum sack, forty pounds of spruce gum, and a frying pan.

Carrots shuffled the cards, picked out the joker, and flipped it pensively into the fire. Then he dealt cold decks all around.

When the goods and chattels of their late companion had been divided by chance—for there was no chance to cheat—somebody remembered Tully.

"He's down there on the coast, starin' after the canoe," said Bates huskily.

He rose and walked toward a heap on the ground covered by a blanket. He started to lift the blanket, hesitated, and finally turned away. Under the blanket lay Tully's brother, shot the night before by Kent.

"Guess we'd better wait till Tully comes," said Carrots uneasily. Bates and Kent had been campmates. An hour later Tully walked into camp.

He spoke to no one that day. In the morning Bates found him down on the coast digging, and said: "Hello, Tully! Guess we ain't much hell on lynchin'!"

"Naw," said Tully. "Git a spade."

"Goin' to plant him there?"

"Yep."

"Where he kin hear them waves?"

"Yep."

"Purty spot."

"Yep."

"Which way will he face?"

"Where he kin watch fur that damned canoe!" cried Tully fiercely.

"He—he can't see," ventured Bates uneasily. "He's dead, ain't he?"

"He'll heave up that there sand when the canoe comes back! An' it's a-comin'! An' Bud Kent'll be in it, dead or alive! Git a spade!"

The pale light of superstition flickered in Bates's eyes. He hesitated.

"The—the dead can't see," he began; "kin they?"

Tully turned a distorted face toward him.

"Yer lie!" he roared. "My brother kin see, dead or livin'! An' he'll see the hangin' of Bud Kent! An' he'll git up outer the grave fur to see it, Bill Bates! I'm tellin' ye! I'm tellin' ye! Deep as I'll plant him, he'll heave that there sand and call to me, when the canoe comes in! I'll hear him; I'll be here! An' we'll live to see the hangin' of Bud Kent!"

About sundown they planted Tully's brother, face to the sea.

II

On the Key to Grief the green waves rub all day. White at the summit, black at the base, the shafted rocks rear splintered pinnacles, slanting like channel buoys. On the polished pillars sea birds brood—white-winged, bright-eyed sea birds, that nestle and preen and flap and clatter their orange-coloured beaks when the sifted spray drives and drifts across the reef.

As the sun rose, painting crimson streaks criss-cross over the waters, the sea birds sidled together, huddling row on row, steeped in downy drowse.

Where the sun of noon burnished the sea, an opal wave washed, listless, noiseless; a sea bird stretched one listless wing.

And into the silence of the waters a canoe glided, bronzed by the sunlight, jewelled by the salt drops stringing from prow to thwart, seaweed a-trail in the diamond-flashing wake, and in the bow a man dripping with sweat.

Up rose the gulls, sweeping in circles, turning, turning over rock and sea, and their clamour filled the sky, starting little rippling echoes among the rocks.

The canoe grated on a shelf of ebony; the seaweed rocked and washed; the little sea crabs sheered sideways, down, down into limpid depths of greenest shadows. Such was the coming of Bud Kent to the Key to Grief.

He drew the canoe halfway up the shelf of rock and sat down, breathing heavily, one brown arm across the bow. For an hour he sat there. The sweat dried under his eyes. The sea birds came back, filling the air with soft querulous notes.

There was a livid mark around his neck, a red, raw circle. The salt wind stung it; the sun burned it into his flesh like a collar of red-hot steel. He touched it at times; once he washed it with cold salt water.

Far in the north a curtain of mist hung on the sea, dense, motionless as the fog on the Grand Banks. He never moved his eyes from it; he knew what it was. Behind it lay the Island of Grief.

All the year round the Island of Grief is hidden by the banks of mist, ramparts of dead white fog encircling it on every side. Ships give it wide berth. Some speak of warm springs on the island whose waters flow far out to sea, rising in steam eternally.

The pelt hunter had come back with tales of forests and deer and flowers everywhere; but he had been drinking much, and much was forgiven him.

The body of the college youth tossed up in the cove on the mainland was battered out of recognition, but some said, when found, one hand clutched a crimson blossom half wilted, but broad as a sap pan.

So Kent lay motionless beside his canoe, burned with thirst, every nerve vibrating, thinking of all these things. It was not fear that whitened the firm flesh under the tan; it was the fear of fear. He must not think—he must throttle dread; his eyes must never falter, his head never turn from that wall of mist across the sea. With set teeth he crushed back terror; with glittering eyes he looked into the hollow eyes of fright. And so he conquered fear.

He rose. The sea birds whirled up into the sky, pitching, tossing, screaming, till the sharp flapping of their pinions set the snapping echoes flying among the rocks.

Under the canoe's sharp prow the kelp bobbed and dipped and parted; the sunlit waves ran out ahead, glittering, dancing. Splash! Splash! Bow and stern! And now he knelt again, and the polished paddle swung and dipped, and swept and swung and dipped again.

Far behind, the clamour of the sea birds lingered in his ears, till the mellow dip of the paddle drowned all sound and the sea was a sea of silence.

No wind came to cool the hot sweat on cheek and breast. The sun blazed a path of flame before him, and he followed out into the waste of waters. The still ocean divided under the bows and rippled innocently away on either side, tinkling, foaming, sparkling like the current in a woodland brook. He looked around at the world of flattened water, and the fear of fear rose up and gripped his throat again. Then he lowered his head, like a tortured bull, and shook the fear of fear from his throat, and drove the paddle into the sea as a butcher stabs, to the hilt.

So at last he came to the wall of mist. It was thin at first, thin and cool, but it thickened and grew warmer, and the fear of fear dragged at his head, but he would not look behind.

Into the fog the canoe shot; the gray water ran by, high as the gunwales, oily, silent. Shapes flickered across the bows, pillars of mist that rode the waters, robed in films of tattered shadows. Gigantic forms towered to dizzy heights above him, shaking out shredded shrouds of cloud. The vast draperies of the fog swayed and hung and trembled as he brushed them; the white twilight deepened to a sombre gloom. And now it grew thinner; the fog became a mist, and the mist a haze, and the haze floated away and vanished into the blue of the heavens.

All around lay a sea of pearl and sapphire, lapping, lapping on a silver shoal.

So he came to the Island of Grief.

III

On the silver shoal the waves washed and washed, breaking like crushed opals where the sand sang with the humming froth.

Troops of little shore birds, wading on the shoal, tossed their sun-tipped wings and scuttled inland, where, dappled with shadow from the fringing forest, the white beach of the island stretched.

The water all around was shallow, limpid as crystal, and he saw the ribbed sand shining on the bottom, where purple seaweed floated, and delicate sea creatures darted and swarmed and scattered again at the dip of his paddle.

Like velvet rubbed on velvet the canoe brushed across the sand. He staggered to his feet, stumbled out, dragged the canoe high up under the trees, turned it bottom upward, and sank beside it, face downward in the sand. Sleep came to drive away the fear of fear, but hunger, thirst, and fever fought with sleep, and he dreamed—dreamed of a rope that sawed his neck, of the fight in the woods, and the shots. He dreamed, too, of the camp, of his forty pounds of spruce gum, of Tully, and of Bates. He dreamed of the fire and the smoke-scorched kettle, of the foul odour of musty bedding, of the greasy cards, and of his own new pack, hoarded for weeks to please the others. All this he dreamed, lying there face downward in the sand; but he did not dream of the face of the dead.

The shadows of the leaves moved on his blonde head, crisp with clipped curls. A butterfly flitted around him, alighting now on his legs, now on the back of his bronzed hands. All the afternoon the bees hung droning among the wildwood blossoms; the leaves above scarcely rustled; the shore birds brooded along the water's edge; the thin tide, sleeping on the sand, mirrored the sky.

Twilight paled the zenith; a breeze moved in the deeper woods; a star glimmered, went out, glimmered again, faded, and glimmered.

Night came. A moth darted to and fro under the trees; a beetle hummed around a heap of seaweed and fell scrambling in the sand. Somewhere among the trees a sound had become distinct, the song of a little brook, melodious, interminable. He heard it in his dream; it threaded all his dreams like a needle of silver, and like a needle it pricked him—pricked his dry throat and cracked lips. It could not awake him; the cool night swathed him head and foot.

Toward dawn a bird woke up and piped. Other birds stirred, restless, half awakened; a gull spread a cramped wing on the shore, preened its feathers, scratched its tufted neck, and took two drowsy steps toward the sea.

The sea breeze stirred out behind the mist bank; it raised the feathers on the sleeping gulls; it set the leaves whispering. A twig snapped, broke off, and fell. Kent stirred, sighed, trembled, and awoke.

The first thing he heard was the song of the brook, and he stumbled straight into the woods. There it lay, a thin, deep stream in the gray morning light, and he stretched himself beside it and laid his cheek in it. A bird drank in the pool, too—a little fluffy bird, bright-eyed and fearless.

His knees were firmer when at last he rose, heedless of the drops that beaded lips and chin. With his knife he dug and scraped at some white roots that hung half meshed in the bank of the brook, and when he had cleaned them in the pool he ate them.

The sun stained the sky when he went down to the canoe, but the eternal curtain of fog, far out at sea, hid it as yet from sight.

He lifted the canoe, bottom upwards, to his head, and, paddle and pole in either hand, carried it into the forest.

After he had set it down he stood a moment, opening and shutting his knife. Then he looked up into the trees. There were birds there, if he could get at them. He looked at the brook. There were the prints of his fingers in the sand; there, too, was the print of something else—a deer's pointed hoof.

He had nothing but his knife. He opened it again and looked at it.

That day he dug for clams and ate them raw. He waded out into the shallows, too, and jabbed at fish with his setting pole, but hit nothing except a yellow crab.

Fire was what he wanted. He hacked and chipped at flinty-looking pebbles, and scraped tinder from a stick of sun-dried driftwood. His knuckles bled, but no fire came.

That night he heard deer in the woods, and could not sleep for thinking, until the dawn came up behind the wall of mist, and he rose with it to drink his fill at the brook and tear raw clams with his white teeth. Again he fought for fire, craving it as he had never craved water, but his knuckles bled, and the knife scraped on the flint in vain.

His mind, perhaps, had suffered somewhat. The white beach seemed to rise and fall like a white carpet on a gusty hearth. The birds, too, that ran along the sand seemed big and juicy, like partridges; and he chased them, hurling shells and bits of driftwood at them till he could scarcely keep his feet for the rising, plunging beach—or carpet, whichever it was. That night the deer aroused him at intervals. He heard them splashing and grunting and crackling along the brook. Once he arose and stole after them, knife in hand, till a false step into the brook awoke him to his folly, and he felt his way back to the canoe, trembling.

Morning came, and again he drank at the brook, lying on the sand where countless heart-shaped hoofs had passed leaving clean imprints; and again he ripped the raw clams from their shells and swallowed them, whimpering.

All day long the white beach rose and fell and heaved and flattened under his bright dry eyes. He chased the shore birds at times, till the unsteady beach tripped him up and he fell full length in the sand. Then he would rise moaning, and creep into the shadow of the wood, and watch the little song-birds in the branches, moaning, always moaning.

His hands, sticky with blood, hacked steel and flint together, but so feebly that now even the cold sparks no longer came.

He began to fear the advancing night; he dreaded to hear the big warm deer among the thickets. Fear clutched him suddenly, and he lowered his head and set his teeth and shook fear from his throat again.

Then he started aimlessly into the woods, crowding past bushes, scraping trees, treading on moss and twig and mouldy stump, his bruised hands swinging, always swinging.

The sun set in the mist as he came out of the woods on to another beach—a warm, soft beach, crimsoned by the glow in the evening clouds.

And on the sand at his feet lay a young girl asleep, swathed in the silken garment of her own black hair, round limbed, brown, smooth as the bloom on the tawny beach.

A gull flapped overhead, screaming. Her eyes, deeper than night, unclosed. Then her lips parted in a cry, soft with sleep, "Ihó!"

She rose, rubbing her velvet eyes. " Ihó!" she cried in wonder; "Inâh!"

The gilded sand settled around her little feet. Her cheeks crimsoned.

"E-hó! E-hó!" she whispered, and hid her face in her hair.

IV

The bridge of the stars spans the sky seas; the sun and the moon are the travellers who pass over it. This was also known in the lodges of the Isantee, hundreds of years ago. Chaské told it to Hârpam, and when Hârpam knew he told it to Hapéda; and so the knowledge spread to Hârka, and from Winona to Wehârka, up and down, across and ever across, woof and web, until it came to the Island of Grief. And how? God knows!

Wehârka, prattling in the tules, may have told Ne-kâ; and Ne-kâ, high in the November clouds, may have told Kay-óshk, who told it to Shingebis, who told it to Skeé-skah, who told it to Sé-só-Kah.

Ihó! Inâh! Behold the wonder of it! And this is the fate of all knowledge that comes to the Island of Grief.

* * *

As the red glow died in the sky, and the sand swam in shadows, the girl parted the silken curtains of her hair and looked at him.

"E-hó!" she whispered again in soft delight.

For now it was plain to her that he was the sun! He had crossed the bridge of stars in the blue twilight; he had come!

"E-tó!"

She stepped nearer, shivering, faint with the ecstasy of this holy miracle wrought before her.

He was the Sun! His blood streaked the sky at dawn; his blood stained the clouds at even. In his eyes the blue of the sky still lingered, smothering two blue stars; and his body was as white as the breast of the Moon.

She opened both arms, hands timidly stretched, palm upward. Her face was raised to his, her eyes slowly closed; the deep-fringed lids trembled.

Like a young priestess she stood, motionless save for the sudden quiver of a limb, a quick pulse-flutter in the rounded throat. And so she worshipped, naked and unashamed, even after he, reeling, fell heavily forward on his face; even when the evening breeze stealing over the sands stirred the hair on his head, as winds stir the fur of a dead animal in the dust.

* * *

When the morning sun peered over the wall of mist, and she saw it was the sun, and she saw him, flung on the sand at her feet, then she knew that he was a man, only a man, pallid as death and smeared with blood.

And yet—miracle of miracles!—the divine wonder in her eyes deepened, and her body seemed to swoon, and fall a-trembling, and swoon again.

For, although it was but a man who lay at her feet, it had been easier for her to look upon a god.

He dreamed that he breathed fire—fire, that he craved as he had never craved water. Mad with delirium, he knelt before the flames, rubbing his torn hands, washing them in the crimson-scented flames. He had water, too, cool scented water, that sprayed his burning flesh, that washed in his eyes, his hair, his throat. After that came hunger, a fierce rending agony, that scorched and clutched and tore at his entrails; but that, too, died away, and he dreamed that he had eaten and all his flesh was warm. Then he dreamed that he slept; and when he slept he dreamed no more.

One day he awoke and found her stretched beside him, soft palms tightly closed, smiling, asleep.

V

Now the days began to run more swiftly than the tide along the tawny beach; and the nights, star-dusted and blue, came and vanished and returned, only to exhale at dawn like perfume from a violet.

They counted hours as they counted the golden bubbles, winking with a million eyes along the foam-flecked shore; and the hours ended, and began, and glimmered, iridescent, and ended as bubbles end in a tiny rainbow haze.

There was still fire in the world; it flashed up at her touch and where she chose. A bow strung with the silk of her own hair, an arrow winged like a sea bird and tipped with shell, a line from the silver tendon of a deer, a hook of polished bone—these were the mysteries he learned, and learned them laughing, her silken head bent close to his.

The first night that the bow was wrought and the glossy string attuned, she stole into the moonlit forest to the brook; and there they stood, whispering, listening, and whispering, though neither understood the voice they loved.

In the deeper woods, Kaug, the porcupine, scraped and snuffed. They heard Wabóse, the rabbit, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, loping across dead leaves in the moonlight. Skeé-skah, the wood-duck, sailed past, noiseless, gorgeous as a floating blossom.

Out on the ocean's placid silver, Shinge-bis, the diver, shook the scented silence with his idle laughter, till Kay-óshk, the gray gull, stirred in his slumber. There came a sudden ripple in the stream, a mellow splash, a soft sound on the sand.

"Ihó! Behold!"

"I see nothing."

The beloved voice was only a wordless melody to her.

"Ihó! Ta-hinca, the red deer! E-hó! The buck will follow!"

"Ta-hinca," he repeated, notching the arrow.

"E-tó! Ta-mdóka!"

So he drew the arrow to the head, and the gray gull feathers brushed his ear, and the darkness hummed with the harmony of the singing string.

Thus died Ta-mdóka, the buck deer of seven prongs.

VI

As an apple tossed spinning into the air, so spun the world above the hand that tossed it into space.

And one day in early spring, Sé-só-Kah, the robin, awoke at dawn, and saw a girl at the foot of the blossoming tree holding a babe cradled in the silken sheets of her hair.

At its feeble cry, Kaug, the porcupine, raised his quilled head. Wabóse, the rabbit, sat still with palpitating sides. Kay-óshk, the gray gull, tiptoed along the beach.

Kent knelt with one bronzed arm around them both.

Ihó! Inâh!" whispered the girl, and held the babe up in the rosy flames of dawn.

But Kent trembled as he looked, and his eyes filled. On the pale green moss their shadows lay—three shadows. But the shadow of the babe was white as froth.

Because it was the firstborn son, they named it Chaské; and the girl sang as she cradled it there in the silken vestments of her hair; all day long in the sunshine she sang:

Wâ-wa, wâ-wa, wâ-we—yeá;
Kah-wéen, nee-zhéka Ke-diaus-âi,
Ke-gâh nau-wâi, ne-mé-go S'weén,
Ne-bâun, ne-bâun, ne-dâun-is âis.
E-we wâ-wa, wâ-we—yeá;
E-we wâ-wa, wâ-we—yeá.

Out in the calm ocean, Shinge-bis, the diver, listened, preening his satin breast in silence. In the forest, Ta-hinca, the red deer, turned her delicate head to the wind.

That night Kent thought of the dead, for the first time since he had come to the Key to Grief.

"Aké-u! aké-u!" chirped Sé-só-Kah, the robin. But the dead never come again.

"Beloved, sit close to us," whispered the girl, watching his troubled eyes. "Ma-cânte maséca."

But he looked at the babe and its white shadow on the moss, and he only sighed: "Ma-cânte maséca, beloved! Death sits watching us across the sea."

Now for the first time he knew more than the fear of fear; he knew fear. And with fear came grief.

He never before knew that grief lay hidden there in the forest. Now he knew it. Still, that happiness, eternally reborn when two small hands reached up around his neck, when feeble fingers clutched his hand—that happiness that Sé-só-Kah understood, chirping to his brooding mate—that Ta-mdóka knew, licking his dappled fawns—that happiness gave him heart to meet grief calmly, in dreams or in the forest depths, and it helped him to look into the hollow eyes of fear.

He often thought of the camp now; of Bates, his blanket mate; of Dyce, whose wrist he had broken with a blow; of Tully, whose brother he had shot. He even seemed to hear the shot, the sudden report among the hemlocks; again he saw the haze of smoke, he caught a glimpse of a tall form falling through the bushes.

He remembered every minute incident of the trial: Bates's hand laid on his shoulder; Tully, red-bearded and wild-eyed, demanding his death; while Dyce spat and spat and smoked and kicked at the blackened log-ends projecting from the fire. He remembered, too, the verdict, and Tully's terrible laugh; and the new jute rope that they stripped off the market-sealed gum packs.

He thought of these things, sometimes wading out on the shoals, shell-tipped fish spear poised: at such times he would miss his fish. He thought of it sometimes when he knelt by the forest stream listening for Ta-hinca's splash among the cresses: at such moments the feathered shaft whistled far from the mark, and Ta-mdóka stamped and snorted till even the white fisher, stretched on a rotting log, flattened his whiskers and stole away into the forest's blackest depths.

When the child was a year old, hour for hour notched at sunset and sunrise, it prattled with the birds, and called to Ne-Kâ, the wild goose, who called again to the child from the sky: "Northward! northward, beloved!"

When winter came—there is no frost on the Island of Grief—Ne-Kâ, the wild goose, passing high in the clouds, called: "Southward! southward, beloved!" And the child answered in a soft whisper of an unknown tongue, till the mother shivered, and covered it with her silken hair.

"O beloved!" said the girl, "Chaské calls to all things living—to Kaug, the porcupine, to Wabóse, to Kay-óshk, the gray gull—he calls, and they understand."

Kent bent and looked into her eyes.

"Hush, beloved; it is not *that* I fear."

"Then what, beloved?"

"His shadow. It is white as surf foam. And at night—I—I have seen—"

"Oh, what?"

"The air about him aglow like a pale rose."

"Ma-cânte maséca. The earth alone lasts. I speak as one dying—I know, O beloved!"

Her voice died away like a summer wind.

"Beloved!" he cried.

But there before him she was changing; the air grew misty, and her hair wavered like shreds of fog, and her slender form swayed, and faded, and swerved, like the mist above a pond.

In her arms the babe was a figure of mist, rosy, vague as a breath on a mirror.

"The earth alone lasts. Inâh! It is the end, O beloved!"

The words came from the mist—a mist as formless as the ether—a mist that drove in and crowded him, that came from the sea, from the clouds, from the earth at his feet. Faint with terror, he staggered forward calling, "Beloved! And thou, Chaské, O beloved! Aké-u! Aké-u!"

Far out at sea a rosy star glimmered an instant in the mist and went out.

A sea bird screamed, soaring over the waste of fog-smothered waters. Again he saw the rosy star; it came nearer; its reflection glimmered in the water.

"Chaské!" he cried.

He heard a voice, dull in the choking mist.

"O beloved, I am here!" he called again.

There was a sound on the shoal, a flicker in the fog, the flare of a torch, a face white, livid, terrible—the face of the dead.

He fell upon his knees; he closed his eyes and opened them. Tully stood beside him with a coil of rope.

* * *

Ihó! Behold the end! The earth alone lasts. The sand, the opal wave on the golden beach, the sea of sapphire, the dusted starlight, the wind, and love, shall die. Death also shall die, and lie on the shores of the skies like the bleached skull there on the Key to Grief, polished, empty, with its teeth embedded in the sand. ❋

In Search of the Unknown

TO

MY FRIEND

E. LE GRAND BEERS

My Dear Le Grand,—You and I were early drawn together by a common love of nature. Your researches into the natural history of the tree-toad, your observations upon the mud-turtles of Providence Township, your experiments with the fresh-water lobster, all stimulated my enthusiasm in a scientific direction, which has crystallized in this helpful little book, dedicated to you.

Pray accept it as an insignificant payment on account for all I owe to you.

The Author.

Where the slanting forest eaves,
Shingled tight with greenest leaves,
Sweep the scented meadow-sedge,
Let us snoop along the edge;
Let us pry in hidden nooks,
Laden with our nature books,
Scaring birds with happy cries,
Chloroforming butterflies,
Rooting up each woodland plant,
Pinning beetle, fly, and ant,
So we may identify
What we've ruined, by-and-by.

In Search of the Unknown

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In Search of the Unknown

I

Because it all seems so improbable—so horribly impossible to me now, sitting here safe and sane in my own library—I hesitate to record an episode which already appears to me less horrible than grotesque. Yet, unless this story is written now, I know I shall never have the courage to tell the truth about the matter—not from fear of ridicule, but because I myself shall soon cease to credit what I now know to be true. Yet scarcely a month has elapsed since I heard the stealthy purring of what I believed to be the shoaling undertow—scarcely a month ago, with my own eyes, I saw that which, even now, I am beginning to believe never existed. As for the harbor-master—and the blow I am now striking at the old order of things— But of that I shall not speak now, or later; I shall try to tell the story simply and truthfully, and let my friends testify as to my probity and the publishers of this book corroborate them.

On the 29th of February I resigned my position under the government and left Washington to accept an offer from Professor Farrago—whose name he kindly permits me to use—and on the first day of April I entered upon my new and congenial duties as general superintendent of the water-fowl department connected with Zoological Gardens then in course of erection at Bronx Park, New York.

For a week I followed the routine, examining the new foundations, studying the architect's plans, following the surveyors through the Bronx thickets, suggesting arrangements for water-courses and pools destined to be included in the enclosures for swans, geese, pelicans, herons, and such of the waders and swimmers as we might expect to acclimate in Bronx Park.

It was at that time the policy of the trustees and officers of the Zoological Gardens neither to employ collectors nor to send out expeditions in search of specimens. The society decided to depend upon voluntary contributions, and I was always busy, part of the day, in dictating answers to correspondents who wrote offering their services as hunters of big game, collectors of all sorts of fauna, trappers, snarers, and also to those who offered specimens for sale, usually at exorbitant rates.

To the proprietors of five-legged kittens, mangy lynxes, moth-eaten coyotes, and dancing bears I returned courteous but uncompromising refusals—of course, first submitting all such letters, together with my replies, to Professor Farrago.

One day towards the end of May, however, just as I was leaving Bronx Park to return to town, Professor Lesard, of the reptilian department, called out to me that Professor Farrago wanted to see me a moment; so I put my pipe into my pocket again and retraced my steps to the temporary, wooden building occupied by Professor Farrago, general superintendent of the Zoological Gardens. The professor, who was sitting at his desk before a pile of letters and replies submitted for approval by me, pushed his glasses down and looked over them at me with whimsical smile that suggested amusement, impatience, annoyance, and perhaps a faint trace of apology.

"Now, here's a letter," he said, with a deliberate gesture towards a sheet of paper impaled on a file—"a letter that I suppose you remember." He disengaged the sheet of paper and handed it to me.

"Oh yes," I replied, with a shrug; "of course the man is mistaken—or—"

"Or what?" demanded Professor Farrago, tranquilly, wiping his glasses.

"—Or a liar," I replied

After a silence he leaned back in his chair and bade me read the letter to him again, and I did so with a contemptuous tolerance for the writer, who must have been either a very innocent victim or a very stupid swindler. I said as much to Professor Farrago, but, to my surprise, he appeared to waver.

"I suppose," he said, with his near-sighted, embarrassed smile, "that nine hundred and ninety-nine men in a thousand would throw that letter aside and condemn the writer as a liar or a fool?"

"In my opinion," said I, "he's one or the other."

"He isn't—in mine," said the professor, placidly.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Here is a man living all alone on a strip of rock and sand between the wilderness and the sea, who wants you to send somebody to take charge of a bird that doesn't exist!"

"How do you know," asked Professor Farrago, "that the bird in question does not exist?"

"It is generally accepted," I replied, sarcastically, "that the great auk has been extinct for years. Therefore I may be pardoned for doubting that our correspondent possesses a pair of them alive."

"Oh, you young fellows," said the professor smiling wearily, "you embark on a theory for destinations that don't exist."

He leaned back in his chair, his amused eyes searching space for the imagery that made him smile.

"Like swimming squirrels, you navigate with the help of Heaven and a stiff breeze, but you never land where you hope to—do you?"

Rather red in the face, I said: "Don't you believe the great auk to be extinct?"

"Audubon saw the great auk."

"Who has seen a single specimen since?"

"Nobody—except our correspondent here," he replied, laughing.

I laughed, too, considering the interview at an end, but the professor went on, coolly:

"Whatever it is that our correspondent has—and I am daring to believe that it *is* the great auk itself—I want you to secure it for the society."

When my astonishment subsided my first conscious sentiment was one of pity. Clearly, Professor Farrago was on the verge of dotage—ah, what a loss to the world!

I believe now that Professor Farrago perfectly interpreted my thoughts, but he betrayed neither resentment nor impatience. I drew a chair up beside his desk—there was nothing to do but to obey, and this fool's errand was none of my conceiving.

Together we made out a list of articles necessary for me and itemized the expenses I might incur, and I set a date for my return, allowing no margin for a successful termination to the expedition.

"Never mind that," said the professor. "What I want you to do is to get those birds here safely. Now, how many men will you take?"

"None," I replied, bluntly; "it's a useless expense, unless there is something to bring back. If there is I'll write you, you may be sure."

"Very well," said Professor Farrago, good-humoredly, "you shall have all the assistance you may require. Can you leave to-night?"

The old gentleman was certainly prompt. I nodded, half-sulkily, aware of his amusement.

"So," I said, picking up my hat, "I am to start north to find a place called Black Harbor, where there is a man named Halyard who possesses, among other household utensils, two extinct great auks—"

We were both laughing by this time. I asked him why on earth he credited the assertion of a man he had never before heard of.

"I suppose," he replied, with the same half-apologetic, half-humorous smile, "it is instinct. I feel, somehow, that this man Halyard *has* got an auk—perhaps two. I can't get away from the idea that we are on the eve of acquiring the rarest of living creatures. It's odd for a scientist to talk as I do; doubtless you're shocked—admit it, now!"

But I was not shocked; on the contrary, I was conscious that the same strange hope that Professor Farrago cherished was beginning, in spite of me, to stir my pulses, too.

"If he has—" I began, then stopped.

The professor and I looked hard at each other in silence.

"Go on," he said, encouragingly.

But I had nothing more to say, for the prospect of beholding with my own eyes a living specimen of the great auk produced a series of conflicting emotions within me which rendered speech profanely superfluous.

As I took my leave Professor Farrago came to the door of the temporary, wooden office and handed me the letter written by the man Halyard. I folded it and put it into my pocket, as Halyard might require it for my own identification.

"How much does he want for the pair?" I asked.

"Ten thousand dollars. Don't demur—if the birds are really—"

"I know," I said, hastily, not daring to hope too much.

"One thing more," said Professor Farrago, gravely; "you know, in that last paragraph of his letter, Halyard speaks of something else in the way of specimens—an undiscovered species of amphibious biped—just read that paragraph again, will you?"

I drew the letter from my pocket and read as he directed:

> "When you have seen the two living specimens of the great auk, and have satisfied yourself that I tell the truth, you may be wise enough to listen without prejudice to a statement I shall make concerning the existence of the strangest creature ever fashioned. I will merely say, at this time, that the creature referred to is an amphibious biped and inhabits the ocean near this coast. More I cannot say, for I personally have not seen the animal, but I have a witness who has, and there are many who affirm that they have seen the creature. You will naturally say that my statement amounts to nothing; but when your representative arrives, if he be free from prejudice, I expect his reports to you concerning this sea-biped will confirm the solemn statements of a witness I *know* to be unimpeachable.
>
> "Yours truly, BURTON HALYARD.
>
> "Black Harbor"

"Well," I said, after a moment's thought, "here goes for the wild-goose chase."

"Wild auk, you mean," said Professor Farrago, shaking hands with me. "You will start to-night, won't you?"

"Yes, but Heaven knows how I'm every going to land in this man Halyard's door-yard. Good-bye!"

"About that sea-biped—" began Professor Farrago, shyly.

"Oh, don't!" "I said; "I can swallow the auks, feathers and claws, but if this fellow Halyard is hinting he's seen an amphibious creature resembling a man—"

"—Or a woman," said the professor, cautiously.

I retired, disgusted, my faith shaken in the mental vigor of Professor Farrago.

II

The three days' voyage by boat and rail was irksome. I bought my kit at Sainte Croix, on the Central Pacific Railroad, and on June 1st I began the last stage of my journey *via* the Sainte Isole broad-gauge, arriving in the wilderness by daylight. A tedious forced march by blazed trail, freshly spotted on the wrong side, of course, brought me to the northern terminus of the rusting, narrow-gauge lumber railway which runs from the heart of the hushed pine wilderness to the sea.

Already a long train of battered flat-cars, piled with sluice-props and roughly hewn sleepers, was moving slowly off into the brooding forest gloom, when I came in sight of the track; but I developed a gratifying and unexpected burst of speed, shouting all the while. The train stopped; I swung myself aboard the last car, where a pleasant young fellow was sitting on the rear brake, chewing spruce and reading a letter.

"Come aboard, sir," he said, looking up with a smile; "I guess you're the man in a hurry."

"I'm looking for a man named Halyard," I said, dropping rifle and knapsack on the fresh-cut, fragrant pile of pine. "Are you Halyard?"

"No, I'm Francis Lee, bossing the mica pit at Port-of-Waves," he replied, "but this letter is from Halyard, asking me to look out for a man in a hurry from Bronx Park, New York."

"I'm that man," said I, filling my pipe and offering him a share of the weed of peace, and we sat side by side smoking very amiably, until a signal from the locomotive sent him forward and I was left alone, lounging at ease, head pillowed on both arms, watching the blue sky flying through the branches overhead.

Long before we came in sight of the ocean I smelled it; the fresh, salt aroma stole into my senses, drowsy with the heated odor of pine and hemlock, and I sat up, peering ahead into the dusky sea of pines.

Fresher and fresher came the wind from the sea, in puffs, in mild, sweet breezes, in steady, freshening currents, blowing the feathery crowns of the pines, setting the balsam's blue tufts rocking.

Lee wandered back over the long line of flats, balancing himself nonchalantly as the cars swung around a sharp curve, where water dripped from a newly propped sluice that suddenly emerged from the depths of the forest to run parallel to the railroad track.

"Built it this spring," he said, surveying his handiwork, which seemed to undulate as the cars swept past, "It runs to the cover—or ought to—" He stopped abruptly with a thoughtful glance at me.

"So you're going over to Halyard's?" he continued, as though answering a question asked by himself.

I nodded.

"You've never been there—of course?"

"No," I said, "and I'm not likely to go again."

I would have told him why I was going if I had not already begun to feel ashamed of my idiotic errand.

"I guess you're going to look at those birds of his," continued Lee, placidly.

"I guess I am," I said, sulkily, glancing askance to see whether he was smiling.

But he only asked me, quite seriously, whether a great auk was really a very rare bird; and I told him that the last one ever seen had been found dead off Labrador in January, 1870. Then I asked him whether these birds of Halyard's were really great auks, and he replied, somewhat indifferently, that he supposed they were—at least, nobody had ever before seen such birds near Port-of-Waves.

"There's something else," he said, running a pine-sliver through his pipe-stem—"something that interests us all here more than auks, big or little. I suppose I might as well speak of it, as you are bound to hear about it sooner or later."

He hesitated, and I could see that he was embarrassed, searching for the exact words to convey his meaning.

"If," said I, "you have anything in this region more important to science than the great auk, I should be very glad to know about it."

Perhaps there was the faintest tinge of sarcasm in my voice, for he shot a sharp glance at me and then turned slightly. After a moment, however, he put his pipe into his pocket, laid hold of the brake with both hands, vaulted to his perch aloft, and glanced down at me.

"Did you ever hear of the harbor-master?" he asked, maliciously.

"Which harbor-master?" I inquired.

"You'll know before long," he observed, with a satisfied glance into perspective.

This rather extraordinary observation puzzled me. I waited for him to resume, and, as he did not, I asked him what he meant.

"If I knew," he said, "I'd tell you. But, come to think of it, I'd be a fool to go into details with a scientific man. You'll hear about the harbor-master—perhaps you will see the harbor-master. In that event I should be glad to converse with you on the subject."

I could not help laughing at his prim and precise manner, and, after a moment, he also laughed, saying:

"It hurts a man's vanity to know he knows a thing that somebody else knows he doesn't know. I'm damned if I say another word about the harbor-master until you've been to Halyard's!"

A harbor-master," I persisted, "is an official who superintends the mooring of ships—isn't he?"

But he refused to be tempted into conversation, and we lounged silently on the lumber until a long, thin whistle from the locomotive and a rush of stinging salt-wind brought us to our feet. Through the trees I could see the bluish-black ocean, stretching out beyond black headlands to meet the clouds; a great wind was roaring among the trees as the train slowly came to a standstill on the edge of the primeval forest.

Lee jumped to the ground and aided me with my rifle and pack, and then the train began to back away along a curved side-track which, Lee said, led to the mica-pit and company stores.

"Now what will you do?" he asked, pleasantly. "I can give you a good dinner and a decent bed to-night if you like—and I'm sure Mrs. Lee would be very glad to have you stop with us as long as you choose."

I thanked him, but said that I was anxious to reach Halyard's before dark, and he very kindly led me along the cliffs and pointed out the path.

"This man Halyard," he said, "is an invalid. He lives at a cove called Black Harbor, and all his truck goes through to him over the company's road. We receive it here, and send a pack-mule through once a month. I've met him; he's a bad-tempered hypochondriac, a cynic at heart, and a man whose word is never doubted. If he says he has a great auk, you may be satisfied he has."

My heart was beating with excitement at the prospect; I looked out across the wooded headlands and tangled stretches of dune and hollow, trying to realize what it might mean to me, to Professor Farrago, to the world, if I should lead back to New York a live auk.

"He's a crank," said Lee; "frankly, I don't like him. If you find it unpleasant there, come back to us."

"Does Halyard live alone?" I asked.

"Yes—except for a professional trained nurse—poor thing!"

"A man?"

"No," said Lee, disgustedly.

Presently he gave me a peculiar glance; hesitated, and finally said: "Ask Halyard to tell you about his nurse and—the harbor-master. Good-bye—I'm due at the quarry. Come and stay with us whenever you care to; you will find a welcome at Port-of-Waves."

We shook hands and parted on the cliff, he turning back into the forest along the railway, I starting northward, pack slung, rifle over my shoulder. Once I met a group of quarrymen, faces burned brick-red, scarred hands swinging as they walked. And, as I passed them with a nod, turning, I saw that they also had turned to look after me, and I caught a word or two of their conversation, whirled back to me on the sea-wind.

They were speaking of the harbor-master.

III

Towards sunset I came out on a sheer granite cliff where the sea-birds were whirling and clamoring, and the great breakers dashed, rolling in double-thundered reverberations on the sun-dyed, crimson sands below the rock.

Across the half-moon of beach towered another cliff, and, behind this, I saw a column of smoke rising in the still air. It certainly came from Halyard's chimney, although the opposite cliff prevented me from seeing the house itself.

I rested a moment to refill my pipe, then resumed rifle and pack, and cautiously started to skirt the cliffs. I had descended half-way towards the beach, and was examining the cliff opposite, when something on the very top of the rock arrested my attention—a man darkly outlined against the sky. The next moment, however, I knew it could not be a man, for the object suddenly glided over the face of the cliff and slid down the sheer, smooth face like a lizard. Before I could get a square look at it, the thing crawled into the surf—or, at least, it seemed to—but the whole episode occurred so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that I was not sure I had seen anything at all.

However, I was curious enough to climb the cliff on the land side and make my way towards the spot where I imagined I saw the man. Of course, there was nothing there—not a trace of a human being, I mean. Something *had* been there—a sea-otter, possibly—for the remains of a freshly killed fish lay on the rock, eaten to the back-bone and tail.

The next moment, below me, I saw the house, a freshly painted, trim, flimsy structure, modern, and very much out of harmony with the splendid savagery surrounding it. It struck a nasty, cheap note in the noble, gray monotony of headland and sea.

The descent was easy enough. I crossed the crescent beach, hard as pink marble, and found a little trodden path among the rocks, that led to the front porch of the house.

There were two people on the porch—I heard their voices before I saw them—and when I set my foot upon the wooden steps, I saw one of them, a woman, rise from her chair and step hastily toward me.

"Come back!" cried the other, a man with a smooth-shaven, deeply lined face, and a pair of angry, blue eyes; and the woman stepped back quietly, acknowledging my lifted hat with a silent inclination.

The man, who was reclining in an invalid's rolling-chair, clapped both large, pale hands to the wheels and pushed himself out along the porch. He had shawls pinned about him, an untidy, drab-colored hat on his head, and, when he looked down at me, he scowled.

"I know who you are," he said, in his acid voice; "you're one of the Zoological men from Bronx Park. You look like it, anyway."

"It is easy to recognize you from your reputation," I replied, irritated at his discourtesy.

"Really," he replied, with something between a sneer and a laugh, "I'm obliged for your frankness. You're after my great auks, are you not?"

"Nothing else would have tempted me into this place," I replied, sincerely.

"Thank Heaven for that," he said. "Sit down a moment; you've interrupted us." Then, turning to the young woman, who wore the neat gown and tiny cap of a professional nurse, he bade her resume what she had been saying. She did so, with a deprecating glance at me, which made the old man sneer again.

"It happened so suddenly," she said, in her low voice, "that I had no chance to get back. The boat was drifting in the cove; I sat in the stern, reading, both oars shipped, and the tiller swinging. Then I heard a scratching under the boat, but thought it might be seaweed—and, next moment, came those soft thumpings, like the sound of a big fish rubbing its nose against a float."

Halyard clutched the wheels of his chair and stared at the girl in grim displeasure.

"Didn't you know enough to be frightened?" he demanded.

"No—not then," she said, coloring faintly; "but when, after a few moments, I looked up and saw the harbor-master running up and down the beach, I was horribly frightened."

"Really?" said Halyard, sarcastically; "it was about time." Then, turning to me, he rasped out: "And that young lady was obliged to row all the way to Port-of-Waves and call to Lee's quarrymen to take her boat in."

Completely mystified, I looked from Halyard to the girl, not in the least comprehending what all this meant.

"That will do," said Halyard, ungraciously, which curt phrase was apparently the usual dismissal for the nurse.

She rose, and I rose, and she passed me with an inclination, stepping noiselessly into the house.

"I want beef-tea!" bawled Halyard after her; then he gave me an unamiable glance.

"I was a well-bred man," he sneered; "I'm a Harvard graduate, too, but I live as I like, and I do what I like, and I say what I like."

"You certainly are not reticent," I said, disgusted.

"Why should I be?" he rasped; "I pay that young woman for my irritability; it's a bargain between us."

"In your domestic affairs," I said, "there is nothing that interests me. I came to see those auks."

"You probably believe them to be razor-billed auks," he said, contemptuously. "But they're not; they're great auks."

I suggested that he permit me to examine them, and he replied, indifferently, that they were in a pen in his backyard, and that I was free to step around the house when I cared to.

I laid my rifle and pack on the veranda, and hastened off with mixed emotions, among which hope no longer predominated. No man in his senses would keep two such precious prizes in a pen in his backyard, I argued, and I was perfectly prepared to find anything from a puffin to a penguin in that pen.

I shall never forget, as long as I live, my stupor of amazement when I came to the wire-covered enclosure. Not only were there two great auks in the pen, alive, breathing, squatting in bulky majesty on their seaweed bed, but one of them was gravely contemplating two newly hatched chicks, all bill and feet, which nestled sedately at the edge of a puddle of salt-water, where some small fish were swimming.

For a while excitement blinded, nay, deafened me. I tried to realize that I was gazing upon the last individuals of an all but extinct race—the sole survivors of the gigantic auk, which, for thirty years, has been accounted an extinct creature.

I believe that I did not move muscle nor limb until the sun had gone down and the crowding darkness blurred my straining eyes and blotted the great, silent, bright-eyed birds from sight.

Even then I could not tear myself away from the enclosure; I listened to the strange, drowsy note of the male bird, the fainter responses of the female, the thin plaints of the chicks, huddling under her breast; I heard their flipper-like, embryotic wings beating sleepily as the birds stretched and yawned their beaks and clacked them, preparing for slumber.

"If you please," came a soft voice from the door, "Mr. Halyard awaits your company to dinner."

IV

I dined well—or, rather, I might have enjoyed my dinner if Mr. Halyard had been eliminated; and the feast consisted exclusively of a joint of beef, the pretty nurse, and myself. She was exceedingly attractive—with a disturbing fashion of lowering her head and raising her dark eyes when spoken to.

As for Halyard, he was unspeakable, bundled up in his snuffy shawls, and making uncouth noises over his gruel. But it is only just to say that his table was worth sitting down to and his wine was sound as a bell.

"Yah!" he snapped, "I'm sick of this cursed soup—and I'll trouble you to fill my glass—"

"It is dangerous for you to touch claret," said the pretty nurse.

"I may as well die at dinner as anywhere," he observed.

"Certainly," said I, cheerfully passing the decanter, but he did not appear overpleased with the attention.

"I can't smoke, either," he snarled, hitching the shawls around until he looked like Richard the Third.

However, he was good enough to shove a box of cigars at me, and I took one and stood up, as the pretty nurse slipped past and vanished into the little parlor beyond.

We sat there for a while without speaking. He picked irritably at the bread-crumbs on the cloth, never glancing in my direction; and I, tired from my long foot-tour, lay back in my chair, silently appreciating one of the best cigars I ever smoked.

"Well," he rasped out at length, "what do you think of my auks—and my veracity?"

I told him that both were unimpeachable.

"Didn't they call me a swindler down there at your museum?" he demanded.

I admitted that I had heard the term applied. Then I made a clean breast of the matter, telling him that it was I who had doubted; that my chief, Professor Farrago, had sent me against my will, and that I was ready and glad to admit that he, Mr. Halyard, was a benefactor of the human race.

"Bosh!" he said. "What good does a confounded wobbly, bandy-toed bird do to the human race?"

But he was pleased, nevertheless; and presently he asked me, not unamiably, to punish his claret again.

"I'm done for," he said; "good things to eat and drink are no good to me. Some day I'll get mad enough to have a fit, and then—"

He paused to yawn.

"Then," he continued, "that little nurse of mine will drink up my claret and go back to civilization, where people are polite."

Somehow or other, in spite of the fact that Halyard was an old pig, what he said touched me. There was certainly not much left in life for him—as he regarded life.

"I'm going to leave her this house," he said, arranging his shawls. "She doesn't know it. I'm going to leave her my money, too. She doesn't know that. Good Lord! What kind of a woman can she be to stand my bad temper for a few dollars a month!"

"I think," said I, "that it's partly because she's poor, partly because she's sorry for you."

He looked up with a ghastly smile.

"You think she really is sorry?"

Before I could answer he went on: "I'm no mawkish sentimentalist, and I won't allow anybody to be sorry for me—do you hear?"

"Oh, I'm not sorry for you!" I said, hastily, and, for the first time since I had seen him, he laughed heartily, without a sneer.

We both seemed to feel better after that; I drank his wine and smoked his cigars, and he appeared to take a certain grim pleasure in watching me.

"There's no fool like a young fool," he observed, presently.

As I had no doubt he referred to me, I paid him no attention.

After fidgeting with his shawls, he gave me an oblique scowl and asked me my age.

"Twenty-four," I replied.

"Sort of a tadpole, aren't you?" he said.

As I took no offence, he repeated the remark.

"Oh, come," said I, "there's no use in trying to irritate me. I see through you; a row acts like a cocktail on you—but you'll have to stick to gruel in my company."

"I call that impudence!" he rasped out, wrathfully.

"I don't care what you call it," I replied, undisturbed, "I am not going to be worried by you. Anyway," I ended, "it is my opinion that you could be very good company if you chose."

The proposition appeared to take his breath away—at least, he said nothing more; and I finished my cigar in peace and tossed the stump into a saucer.

"Now," said I, "what price do you set upon your birds, Mr. Halyard?"

"Ten thousand dollars," he snapped, with an evil smile.

"You will receive a certified check when the birds are delivered," I said, quietly.

"You don't mean to say you agree to that outrageous bargain—and I won't take a cent less, either—Good Lord!—haven't you any spirit left?" he cried, half rising from his pile of shawls.

His piteous eagerness for a dispute sent me into laughter impossible to control, and he eyed me, mouth open, animosity rising visibly.

Then he seized the wheels of his invalid chair and trundled away, too mad to speak; and I strolled out into the parlor, still laughing.

The pretty nurse was there, sewing under a hanging lamp.

"If I am not indiscreet—" I began.

"Indiscretion is the better part of valor," said she, dropping her head but raising her eyes.

So I sat down with a frivolous smile peculiar to the appreciated.

"Doubtless," said I, "you are hemming a 'kerchief."

"Doubtless I am not," she said; "this is a night-cap for Mr. Halyard."

A mental vision of Halyard in a night-cap, very mad, nearly set me laughing again.

"Like the King of Yvetot, he wears his crown in bed," I said, flippantly.

"The King of Yvetot might have made that remark," she observed, re-threading her needle.

It is unpleasant to be reproved. How large and red and hot a man's ears feel.

To cool them, I strolled out to the porch; and, after a while, the pretty nurse came out, too, and sat down in a chair not far away. She probably regretted her lost opportunity to be flirted with.

"I have so little company—it is a great relief to see somebody from the world," she said. "If you can be agreeable, I wish you would."

The idea that she had come out to see me was so agreeable that I remained speechless until she said: "Do tell me what people are doing in New York."

So I seated myself on the steps and talked about the portion of the world inhabited by me, while she sat sewing in the dull light that straggled out from the parlor windows.

She had a certain coquetry of her own, using the usual methods with an individuality that was certainly fetching. For instance, when she lost her needle—and, another time, when we both, on hands and knees, hunted for her thimble.

However, directions for these pastimes may be found in contemporary classics.

I was as entertaining as I could be—perhaps not quite as entertaining as a young man usually thinks he is. However, we got on very well together until I asked her tenderly who the harbor-master might be, whom they all discussed so mysteriously.

"I do not care to speak about it," she said, with a primness of which I had not suspected her capable.

Of course I could scarcely pursue the subject after that—and, indeed, I did not intend to—so I began to tell her how I fancied I had seen a man on the cliff that afternoon, and how the creature slid over the sheer rock like a snake.

To my amazement, she asked me to kindly discontinue the account of my adventures, in an icy tone, which left no room for protest.

"It was only a sea-otter," I tried to explain, thinking perhaps she did not care for snake stories.

But the explanation did not appear to interest her, and I was mortified to observe that my impression upon her was anything but pleasant.

"She doesn't seem to like me and my stories," thought I, "but she is too young, perhaps, to appreciate them."

So I forgave her—for she was even prettier than I had thought her at first—and I took my leave, saying that Mr. Halyard would doubtless direct me to my room.

Halyard was in his library, cleaning a revolver, when I entered.

"Your room is next to mine," he said; "pleasant dreams, and kindly refrain from snoring."

"May I venture an absurd hope that you will do the same?" I replied, politely.

That maddened him, so I hastily withdrew.

I had been asleep for at least two hours when a movement by my bedside and a light in my eyes awakened me. I sat bolt upright in bed, blinking at Halyard, who, clad in a dressing-gown and wearing a night-cap, had wheeled himself into my room with one hand, while with the other he solemnly waved a candle over my head.

"I'm so cursed lonely," he said—"come, there's a good fellow—talk to me in your own original, impudent way."

I objected strenuously, but he looked so worn and thin, so lonely and bad-tempered, so lovelessly grotesque, that I got out of bed and passed a spongeful of cold water over my head.

Then I returned to bed and propped the pillows up for a back-rest, ready to quarrel with him if it might bring some little pleasure into his morbid existence.

"No," he said, amiably, "I'm too worried to quarrel, but I'm much obliged for your kindly offer. I want to tell you something."

"What?" I asked, suspiciously.

"I want to ask you if you ever saw a man with gills like a fish?"

"Gills?" I repeated.

"Yes, gills! Did you?"

"No," I replied, angrily, "and neither did you."

"No, I never did," he said, in a curiously placid voice, "but there's a man with gills like a fish who lives in the ocean out there. Oh, you needn't look that way—nobody ever thinks of doubting my word, and I tell you that there's a man—or a thing that looks like a man—as big as you are, too—all slate-colored—with nasty red gills like a fish!—and I've a witness to prove what I say!"

"Who?" I asked, sarcastically.

"The witness? My nurse."

"Oh! She saw a slate-colored man with gills?"

"Yes, she did. So did Francis Lee, superintendent of the Mica Quarry Company at Port-of-Waves. So have a dozen men who work in the quarry. Oh, you needn't laugh, young man. It's an old story here, and anybody can tell you about the harbor-master."

"The harbor-master!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, that slate-colored thing with gills, that looks like a man—and—by Heaven! *is* a man—that's the harbor-master. Ask any quarryman at Port-of-Waves what it is that comes purring around their boats at the wharf and unties painters and changes the mooring of every cat-boat in the cove at night! Ask Francis Lee what it was he saw running and leaping up and down the shoal at sunset last Friday! Ask anybody along the coast what sort of a thing moves about the cliffs like a man and slides over them into the sea like an otter—"

"I saw it do that!" I burst out.

"Oh, did you? Well, *what was it?*"

Something kept me silent, although a dozen explanations flew to my lips.

After a pause, Halyard said: "You saw the harbor-master, that's what you saw!"

I looked at him without a word.

"Don't mistake me," he said, pettishly; "I don't think that the harbor-master is a spirit or a sprite or a hobgoblin, or any sort of damned rot. Neither do I believe it to be an optical illusion."

"What do you think it is?" I asked.

"I think it's a man—I think it's a branch of the human race—that's what I think. Let me tell you something: the deepest spot in the Atlantic Ocean is a trifle over five miles deep—and I suppose you know that this place lies only about a quarter of a mile off this headland. The British exploring vessel, *Gull*, Captain Marotte, discovered and sounded it, I believe. Anyway, it's there, and it's my belief that the profound depths are inhabited by the remnants of the last race of amphibious human beings!"

This was childish; I did not bother to reply.

"Believe it or not, as you will," he said, angrily; "one thing I know, and that is this: the harbor-master has taken to hanging around my cove, and he is attracted by my nurse! I won't have it! I'll blow his fishy gills out of his head if I ever get a shot at him! I don't care whether it's homicide or not—anyway, it's a new kind of murder and it attracts me!"

I gazed at him incredulously, but he was working himself into a passion, and I did not choose to say what I thought.

"Yes, this slate-colored thing with gills goes purring and grinning and spitting about after my nurse—when she walks, when she rows, when she sits on the beach! Gad! It drives me nearly frantic. I won't tolerate it, I tell you!"

"No," said I, "I wouldn't either." And I rolled over in bed convulsed with laughter.

The next moment I heard my door slam. I smothered my mirth and rose to close the window, for the land-wind blew cold from the forest, and a drizzle was sweeping the carpet as far as my bed.

That luminous glare which sometimes lingers after the stars go out, threw a trembling, nebulous radiance over sand and cove. I heard the seething currents under the breakers' softened thunder—louder than I ever heard it. Then, as I closed my window, I saw a man standing, ankle-deep, in the surf, all alone there in the night. But—was it a man? For the figure suddenly began running over the beach on all fours like a beetle, waving its limbs like feelers. Before I could throw open the window again it darted into the surf, and, when I leaned out into the chilling drizzle, I saw nothing save the flat ebb crawling on the coast—I heard nothing save the purring of bubbles on seething sands.

V

It took me a week to perfect my arrangements for transporting the great auks, by water, to Port-of-Waves, where a lumber schooner was to be sent from Petite Sainte Isole, chartered by me for a voyage to New York.

I had constructed a cage made of osiers, in which my auks were to squat until they arrived at Bronx Park. My telegrams to Professor Farrago were brief. One merely said "Victory!" Another explained that I wanted no assistance; and a third read: "Schooner chartered. Arrive New York July 1st. Send furniture-van to foot of Bluff Street."

My week as a guest of Mr. Halyard proved interesting. I wrangled with that invalid to his heart's content, I worked all day on my osier cage, I hunted the thimble in the moonlight with the pretty nurse. We sometimes found it.

As for the thing they called the harbor-master, I saw it a dozen times, but always either at night or so far away and so close to the sea that of course no trace of it remained when I reached the spot, rifle in hand.

I had quite made up my mind that the so-called harbor-master was a demented darky—wandered from, Heaven knows where—perhaps shipwrecked and gone mad from his sufferings. Still, it was far from pleasant to know that the creature was strongly attracted by the pretty nurse.

She, however, persisted in regarding the harbor-master as a sea-creature; she earnestly affirmed that it had gills, like a fish's gills, that it had a soft, fleshy hole for a mouth, and its eyes were luminous and lidless and fixed.

"Besides," she said, with a shudder, "it's all slate color, like a porpoise, and it looks as wet as a sheet of India-rubber in a dissecting-room."

The day before I was to set sail with my auks in a cat-boat bound for Port-of-Waves, Halyard trundled up to me in his chair and announced his intention of going with me.

"Going where?" I asked.

"To Port-of-Waves and then to New York," he replied, tranquilly.

I was doubtful, and my lack of cordiality hurt his feelings.

"Oh, of course, if you need the sea-voyage—" I began.

"I don't; I need you," he said, savagely; "I need the stimulus of our daily quarrel. I never disagreed so pleasantly with anybody in my life; it agrees with me; I am a hundred per cent. better than I was last week."

I was inclined to resent this, but something in the deep-lined face of the invalid softened me. Besides, I had taken a hearty liking to the old pig.

"I don't want any mawkish sentiment about it," he said, observing me closely; "I won't permit anybody to feel sorry for me—do you understand?"

"I'll trouble you to use a different tone in addressing me," I replied, hotly; "I'll feel sorry for you if I choose to!" And our usual quarrel proceeded, to his deep satisfaction.

By six o'clock next evening I had Halyard's luggage stowed away in the cat-boat, and the pretty nurse's effects corded down, with the newly hatched auk-chicks in a hat-box on top. She and I placed the osier cage aboard, securing it firmly, and then, throwing tablecloths over the auks' heads, we led those simple and dignified birds down the path and across the plank at the little wooden pier. Together we locked up the house, while Halyard stormed at us both and wheeled himself furiously up and down the beach below. At the last moment she forgot her thimble. But we found it, I forget where.

"Come on!" shouted Halyard, waving his shawls furiously; "what the devil are you doing up there?"

He received our explanation with a sniff, and we trundled him aboard without further ceremony.

"Don't run me across the plank like a streamer trunk!" he shouted, as I shot him dexterously into the cock-pit. But the wind was dying anyway, and I had no time to dispute with him then.

The sun was setting above the pine-clad ridge as our sail flapped and partly filled, and I cast off, and began a long tack, east by south, to avoid the spouting rocks on our starboard bow.

The sea-birds rose in clouds as we swung across the shoal, the black surf-ducks scuttered out to sea, the gulls tossed their sun-tipped wings in the ocean, riding the rollers like bits of froth.

Already we were sailing slowly out across that great hole in the ocean, five miles deep, the most profound sounding ever taken in the Atlantic. The presence of great heights or great depths, seen or unseen, always impresses the human mind—perhaps oppresses it. We were very silent; the sunlight stain on cliff and beach deepened to crimson, then faded into sombre purple bloom that lingered long after the rose-tint died out in the zenith.

Our progress was slow; at times, although the sail filled with the rising land breeze, we scarcely seemed to move at all.

"Of course," said the pretty nurse, "we couldn't be aground in the deepest hole in the Atlantic."

"Scarcely," said Halyard, sarcastically, "unless we're grounded on a whale."

"What's that soft thumping?" I asked. "Have we run afoul of a barrel or log?"

"It was almost too dark to see, but I leaned over the rail and swept the water with my hand.

Instantly something smooth glided under it, like the back of a great fish, and I jerked my hand back to the tiller. At the same moment the whole surface of the water seemed to purr, with a sound like the breaking of froth in a champagne-glass.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Halyard, sharply.

"A fish came up under my hand," I said; "a porpoise or something—"

With a low cry, the pretty nurse clasped my arm in both her hands.

"Listen!" she whispered. "It's purring around the boat."

"What the devil's purring?" shouted Halyard. "I won't have anything purring around me!"

At that moment, to my amazement, I saw that the boat had stopped entirely, although the sail was full and the small pennant fluttered from the mast-head. Something, too, was tugging at the rudder, twisting and jerking it until the tiller strained and creaked in my hand. All at once it snapped; the tiller swung useless and the boat whirled around, heeling in the stiffening wind, and drove shoreward.

It was then that I, ducking to escape the boom, caught a glimpse of something ahead—something that a sudden wave seemed to toss on deck and leave there, wet and flapping—a man with round, fixed, fishy eyes, and soft, slaty skin.

But the horror of the thing were the two gills that swelled and relaxed spasmodically, emitting a rasping, purring sound—two gasping, blood-red gills, all fluted and scalloped and distended.

Frozen with amazement and repugnance, I stared at the creature; I felt the hair stirring on my head and the icy sweat on my forehead.

"It's the harbor-master!" screamed Halyard.

The harbor-master had gathered himself into a wet lump, squatting motionless in the bows under the mast; his lidless eyes were phosphorescent, like the eyes of living codfish. After a while I felt that either fright or disgust was going to strangle me where I sat, but it was only the arms of the pretty nurse clasped around me in a frenzy of terror.

There was not a fire-arm aboard that we could get at. Halyard's hand crept backward where a steel shod boat-hook lay, and I also made a clutch at it. The next moment I had it in my hand, and staggered forward, but the boat was already tumbling shoreward among the breakers, and the next I knew the harbor-master ran at me like a colossal rat, just as the boat rolled over and over through the surf, spilling freight and passengers among the seaweed-covered rocks.

When I came to myself I was thrashing about knee-deep in a rocky pool, blinded by the water and half suffocated, while under my feet, like a stranded porpoise, the harbor-master made the water boil in his efforts to upset me. But his limbs seemed soft and boneless; he had no nails, no teeth, and he bounced and thumped and flapped and splashed like a fish, while I rained blows on him with the boat-hook that sounded like blows on a football. And all the while his gills were blowing out and frothing, and purring, and his lidless eyes looked into mine, until, nauseated and trembling, I dragged myself back to the beach, where already the pretty nurse alternately wrung her hands and her petticoats in ornamental despair.

Beyond the cove, Halyard was bobbing up and down, afloat in his invalid's chair, trying to steer shoreward. He was the maddest man I ever saw.

"Have you killed that rubber-headed thing yet?" he roared.

"I can't kill it," I shouted, breathlessly. "I might as well try to kill a football!"

"Can't you punch a hole in it?" he bawled. "If I can only get at him—"

His words were drowned in a thunderous splashing, a roar of great, broad flippers beating the sea, and I saw the gigantic forms of my two great auks, followed by their chicks, blundering past in a shower of spray, driving headlong out into the ocean.

"Oh, Lord!" I said. "I can't stand that," and, for the first time in my life, I fainted peacefully—and appropriately—at the feet of the pretty nurse.

* * *

It is within the range of possibility that this story may be doubted. It doesn't matter; nothing can add to the despair of a man who has lost two great auks.

As for Halyard, nothing affects him—except his involuntary sea-bath, and that did him so much good that he writes me from the South that he's going on a walking-tour through Switzerland—if I'll join him. I might have joined him if he had not married the pretty nurse. I wonder whether— But, of course, this is no place for speculation.

In regard to the harbor-master, you may believe it or not, as you choose. But if you hear of any great auks being found, kindly throw a tablecloth over their heads and notify the authorities at the new Zoological Gardens in Bronx Park, New York. The reward is ten thousand dollars.

VI

Before I proceed any further, common decency requires me to reassure my readers concerning my intentions, which, Heaven knows, are far from flippant.

To separate fact from fancy has always been difficult for me, but now that I have had the honor to be chosen secretary of the Zoological Gardens in Bronx Park, I realize keenly that unless I give up writing fiction nobody will believe what I write about science. Therefore it is to a serious and unimaginative public that I shall hereafter address myself; and I do it in the modest confidence that I shall neither be distrusted nor doubted, although unfortunately I still write in that irrational style which suggests covert frivolity, and for which I am undergoing a course of treatment in English literature at Columbia College. Now, having promised to avoid originality and confine myself to facts, I shall tell what I have to tell concerning the dingue, the mammoth, and—*something else.*

For some weeks it had been rumored that Professor Farrago, president of the Bronx Park Zoological Society, would resign, to accept an enormous salary as manager of Barnum & Bailey's circus in London, and had promised to cable his decision before the day was over.

I had hoped he would decide to remain with us. I was his secretary and particular favorite, and I viewed, without enthusiasm, the advent of a new president, who might shake us all out of our congenial and carefully excavated ruts. However, it was plain that the trustees of the society expected the resignation of Professor Farrago, for they had been in secret session all day, considering the names of possible candidates to fill Professor Farrago's large, old-fashioned shoes. These preparations worried me, for I could scarcely expect another chief as kind and considerate as Professor Leonidas Farrago.

That afternoon in June I left my office in the Administration Building in Bronx Park and strolled out under the trees for a breath of air. But the heat of the sun soon drove me to seek shelter under a little square arbor, a shady retreat covered with purple wistaria and honeysuckle. As I entered the arbor I noticed that there were three other people seated there—an elderly lady with masculine features and short hair, a younger lady sitting beside her, and, farther away, a rough-looking young man reading a book.

For a moment I had an indistinct impression of having met the elder lady somewhere, and under circumstances not entirely agreeable, but beyond a stony and indifferent glance she paid no attention to me. As for the younger lady, she did not look at me at all. She was very young, with pretty eyes, a mass of silky brown hair, and a skin as fresh as a rose which had just been rained on.

With that delicacy peculiar to lonely scientific bachelors, I modestly sat down beside the rough young man, although there was more room beside the younger lady. "Some lazy loafer reading a penny dreadful," I thought, glancing at him, then at the title of his book. Hearing me beside him, he turned around and blinked over his shabby shoulder, and the movement uncovered the page he had been silently conning. The volume in his hands was Darwin's famous monograph on the monodactyl.

He noticed the astonishment on my face and smiled uneasily, shifting the short clay pipe in his mouth.

"I guess," he observed, "that this here book is too much for me, mister."

"It's rather technical," I replied, smiling.

"Yes," he said, in vague admiration; "it's fierce, ain't it?"

After a silence I asked him if he would tell me why he had chosen Darwin as a literary pastime.

"Well," he said, placidly, "I was tryin' to read about annermals, but I'm against a word-slinger this time all right. Now here's a gum-twister," and he painfully spelled out m-o-n-o-d-a-c-t-y-l, breathing hard all the while.

"Monodactyl," I said, "means a single-toed creature."

He turned the page with alacrity. "Is that the beast he's talkin' about?" he asked.

The illustration he pointed out was a wood-cut representing Darwin's reconstruction of the dingue from the fossil bones in the British Museum. It was a well-executed wood-cut, showing a dingue in the foreground and, to give scale, a mammoth in the middle distance.

"Yes," I replied, "that is the dingue."

"I've seen one," he observed, calmly.

I smiled and explained that the dingue had been extinct for some thousands of years.

"Oh, I guess not," he replied, with cool optimism. Then he placed a grimy forefinger on the mammoth.

"I've seen them things, too," he remarked.

Again I patiently pointed out his error, and suggested that he referred to the elephant.

"Elephant be blowed!" he replied scornfully. "I guess I know what I seen. An' I seen that there thing you call a dingue, too."

Not wishing to prolong a futile discussion, I remained silent. After a moment he wheeled around, removing the pipe from his hard mouth.

"Did you ever hear tell of Graham's Glacier?" he demanded.

"Certainly," I replied, astonished; "it's the southernmost glacier in British America."

"Right," he said. "And did you ever hear tell of the Hudson Mountings, mister?"

"Yes," I replied.

"What's behind 'em?" he snapped out.

"Nobody knows," I answered. "They are considered impassable."

"They ain't, though," he said, doggedly; "I've been behind 'em."

"Really!" I replied, tiring of his yarn.

"Ya-as, reely," he repeated, sullenly. Then he began to fumble and search through the pages of his book until he found what he wanted. "Mister," he said, "just read that out loud, please."

The passage he indicated was the famous chapter beginning:

> "Is the mammoth extinct? Is the dingue extinct? Probably. And yet the aborigines of British America maintain the contrary. Probably both the mammoth and the dingue are extinct; but until expeditions have penetrated and explored not only the unknown region in Alaska but also that hidden tableland beyond the Graham Glacier and the Hudson Mountains, it will not be possible to definitely announce the total extinction of either the mammoth or the dingue."

When I had read it, slowly, for his benefit, he brought his hand down smartly on one knee and nodded rapidly.

"Mister," he said, "that gent knows a thing or two, and don't you forgit it!" Then he demanded, abruptly, how I knew he hadn't been behind the Graham Glacier.

I explained.

"Shucks!" he said; "there's a road five miles wide inter that there tableland. Mister, I ain't been in New York long; I come inter port a week ago on the *Arctic Belle*, whaler. I was in the Hudson range when that there Graham Glacier bust up—"

"What!" I exclaimed.

"Didn't you know it?" he asked. "Well, mebbe it ain't in the papers, but it busted all right—blowed up by a earthquake an' volcano combine. An', mister, it was oreful. My, how I did run!"

"Do you mean to tell me that some convulsion of the earth has shattered the Graham Glacier?" I asked.

"Convulsions? Ya-as, an' fits, too," he said, sulkily. "The hull blame thing dropped inter a hole. An' say, mister, home an' mother is good enough fur me now."

I stared at him stupidly.

"Once," he said, "I ketched pelts fur them sharps at Hudson Bay, like any yaller husky, but the things I seen arter that convulsion-fit—the *things I seen behind the Hudson Mountings*—don't make me hanker arter no life on the pe-rarie wild, lemme tell yer. I may be a Mother Carey chicken, but this chicken has got enough."

After a long silence I picked up his book again and pointed at the picture of the mammoth.

"What color is it?" I asked.

"Kinder red an' brown," he answered, promptly. "It's woolly, too."

Astounded, I pointed to the dingue.

"One-toed," he said, quickly; "makes a noise like a bell when scutterin' about."

Intensely excited, I laid my hand on his arm. "My society will give you a thousand dollars," I said, "if you pilot me inside the Hudson table-land and show me either a mammoth or a dingue!"

He looked me calmly in the eye.

"Mister," he said, slowly, "have you got a million for to squander on me?"

"No," I said, suspiciously.

"Because," he went on, "it wouldn't be enough. Home an' mother suits me now."

He picked up his book and rose. In vain I asked his name and address; in vain I begged him to dine with me—to become my honored guest.

"Nit," he said, shortly, and shambled off down the path.

But I was not going to lose him like that. I rose and deliberately started to stalk him. It was easy. He shuffled along, pulling on his pipe, and I after him.

It was growing a little dark, although the sun still reddened the tops of the maples. Afraid of losing him in the falling dusk, I once more approached him and laid my hand upon his ragged sleeve.

"Look here," he cried, wheeling about, "I want you to quit follerin' me. Don't I tell you money can't make me go back to them mountings!" And as I attempted to speak, he suddenly tore off his cap and pointed to his head. His hair was white as snow.

"That's what come of monkeyin' inter your cursed mountings," he shouted, fiercely. "There's things in there what no Christian oughter see. Lemme alone er I'll bust yer."

He shambled on, doubled fists swinging by his side. The next moment, setting my teeth obstinately, I followed him and caught him by the park gate. At my hail he whirled around with a snarl, but I grabbed him by the throat and backed him violently against the park wall.

"You invaluable ruffian," I said, "now you listen to me. I live in that big stone building, and I'll give you a thousand dollars to take me behind the

Graham Glacier. Think it over and call on me when you are in a pleasanter frame of mind. If you don't come by noon to-morrow I'll go to the Graham Glacier without you."

He was attempting to kick me all the time, but I managed to avoid him, and when I had finished I gave him a shove which almost loosened his spinal column. He went reeling out across the sidewalk, and when he had recovered his breath and his balance he danced with displeasure and displayed a vocabulary that astonished me. However, he kept his distance.

As I turned back into the park, satisfied that he would not follow, the first person I saw was the elderly, stony-faced lady of the wistaria arbor advancing on tiptoe. Behind her came the younger lady with cheeks like a rose that had been rained on.

Instantly it occurred to me that they had followed us, and at the same moment I knew who the stony-faced lady was. Angry, but polite, I lifted my hat and saluted her, and she, probably furious at having been caught tiptoeing after me, cut me dead. The younger lady passed me with face averted, but even in the dusk I could see the tip of one little ear turn scarlet.

Walking on hurriedly, I entered the Administration Building, and found Professor Lesard, of the reptilian department, preparing to leave.

"Don't you do it," I said, sharply; "I've got exciting news."

"I'm only going to the theatre," he replied. "It's a good show—Adam and Eve; there's a snake in it, you know. It's in my line."

"I can't help it," I said; and I told him briefly what had occurred in the arbor.

"But that's not all," I continued, savagely. "Those women followed us, and who do you think one of them turned out to be? Well, it was Professor Smawl, of Barnard College, and I'll bet every pair of boots I own that she starts for the Graham Glacier within a week. Idiot that I was!" I exclaimed, smiting my head with both hands. "I never recognized her until I saw her tiptoeing and craning her neck to listen. Now she knows about the glacier; she heard every word that young ruffian said, and she'll go to the glacier if it's only to forestall me."

Professor Lesard looked anxious. He knew that Miss Smawl, professor of natural history at Barnard College, had long desired an appointment at the Bronx Park gardens. It was even said she had a chance of succeeding Professor Farrago as president, but that, of course, must have been a joke. However, she haunted the gardens, annoying the keepers by persistently poking the animals with her umbrella. On one occasion she sent us word that she desired to enter the tigers' enclosure for the purpose of making experiments in hypnotism. Professor Farrago was absent, but I took it upon myself to send back word that I feared the tigers might injure her. The miserable small boy who took my message informed her that I was afraid she might injure the tigers, and the unpleasant incident almost cost me my position.

"I am quite convinced," said I to Professor Lesard, "that Miss Smawl is perfectly capable of abusing the information she overheard, and of starting herself to explore a region that, by all the laws of decency, justice, and prior claim, belongs to me."

"Well," said Lesard, with a peculiar laugh, "it's not certain whether you can go at all."

"Professor Farrago will authorize me," I said, confidently.

"Professor Farrago has resigned," said Lesard. It was a bolt from a clear sky.

"Good Heavens!" I blurted out. "What will become of the rest of us, then?"

"I don't know," he replied. "The trustees are holding a meeting over in the Administration Building to elect a new president for us. It depends on the new president what becomes of us."

"Lesard," I said, hoarsely, "you don't suppose that they could possibly elect Miss Smawl as our president, do you?"

He looked at me askance and bit his cigar.

"I'd be in a nice position, wouldn't I?" said I, anxiously.

"The lady would probably make you walk the plank for that tiger business," he replied.

"But I didn't do it," I protested, with sickly eagerness. "Besides, I explained to her—"

He said nothing, and I stared at him, appalled by the possibility of reporting to Professor Smawl for instructions next morning.

"See here, Lesard," I said, nervously, "I wish you would step over to the Administration Building and ask the trustees if I may prepare for this expedition. Will you?"

He glanced at me sympathetically. It was quite natural for me to wish to secure my position before the new president was elected—especially as there was a chance of the new president being Miss Smawl.

"You are quite right," he said; "the Graham Glacier would be the safest place for you if our next president is to be the Lady of the Tigers." And he started across the park puffing his cigar.

I sat down on the doorstep to wait for his return, not at all charmed with the prospect. It made me furious, too, to see my ambition nipped with the frost of a possible veto from Miss Smawl.

"If she is elected," thought I, "there is nothing for me but to resign—to avoid the inconvenience of being shown the door. Oh, I wish I had allowed her to hypnotize the tigers!"

Thoughts of crime flitted through my mind. Miss Smawl would not remain president—or anything else very long—if she persisted in her desire for the tigers. And then when she called for help I would pretend not to hear.

Aroused from criminal meditation by the return of Professor Lesard, I jumped up and peered into his perplexed eyes. "They've elected a president," he said, "but they won't tell us who the president is until to-morrow."

"You don't think—" I stammered.

"I don't know. But I know this: the new president sanctions the expedition to the Graham Glacier, and directs you to choose an assistant and begin preparations for four people."

Overjoyed, I seized his hand and said, "Hurray!" in a voice weak with emotion. "The old dragon isn't elected this time," I added, triumphantly.

"By-the-way," he said, "who was the other dragon with her in the park this evening?"

I described her in a more modulated voice.

"Whew!" observed Professor Lesard, "that must be her assistant, Professor Dorothy Van Twiller! She's the prettiest blue-stocking in town."

With this curious remark my confrère followed me into my room and wrote down the list of articles I dictated to him. The list included a complete camping equipment for myself and three other men.

"Am I one of those other men?" inquired Lesard, with an unhappy smile.

Before I could reply my door was shoved open and a figure appeared at the threshold, cap in hand.

"What do you want?" I asked, sternly; but my heart was beating high with triumph.

The figure shuffled; then came a subdued voice:

"Mister, I guess I'll go back to the Graham Glacier along with you. I'm Billy Spike, an' it kinder scares me to go back to them Hudson Mountains, but somehow, mister, when you choked me and kinder walked me off on my ear, why, mister, I kinder took to you like."

There was absolute silence for a minute; then he said:

"So if you go, I guess I'll go, too, mister."

"For a thousand dollars?"

"Fur nawthin'," he muttered—"or what you like."

"All right, Billy," I said, briskly; "just look over those rifles and ammunition and see that everything's sound."

He slowly lifted his tough young face and gave me a doglike glance. They were hard eyes, but there was gratitude in them.

"You'll get your throat slit," whispered Lesard.

"Not while Billy's with me," I replied, cheerfully.

Late that night, as I was preparing for pleasant dreams, a knock came on my door and a telegraph-messenger handed me a note, which I read, shivering in my bare feet, although the thermometer marked eighty Fahrenheit:

> "You will immediately leave for the Hudson Mountains *via* Wellman Bay, Labrador, there to await further instructions. Equipment for yourself and one assistant will include following articles" [here began a list of camping utensils, scientific paraphernalia, and provisions]. "The steamer *Penguin* sails at five o'clock to-morrow morning. Kindly find yourself on board at that hour. Any excuse for not complying with these orders will be accepted as your resignation.
>
> "SUSAN SMAWL,
> "President Bronx Zoological Society."

"Lesard!" I shouted, trembling with fury.

He appeared at his door, chastely draped in pajamas; and he read the insolent letter with terrified alacrity.

"What are you going to do—resign?" he asked, much frightened.

"Do!" I snarled, grinding my teeth; "I'm going—that's what I'm going to do!"

"But—but you can't get ready and catch that steamer, too," he stammered.

He did not know me.

VII

And so it came about that one calm evening towards the end of June, William Spike and I went into camp under the southerly shelter of that vast granite wall called the Hudson Mountains, there to await the promised "further instructions."

It had been a tiresome trip by steamer to Anticosti, from there by schooner to Widgeon Bay, then down the coast and up the Cape Clear River to Port Porpoise. There we bought three pack-mules and started due north on the Great Fur Trail. The second day out we passed Fort Boisé, the last outpost of civilization, and on the sixth day we were travelling eastward under the granite mountain parapets.

On the evening of the sixth day out from Fort Boisé we went into camp for the last time before entering the unknown land.

I could see it already through my field-glasses, and while William was building the fire I climbed up among the rocks above and sat down, glasses levelled, to study the prospect.

There was nothing either extraordinary or forbidding in the landscape which stretched out beyond; to the right the solid palisade of granite cut off the view; to the left the palisade continued, an endless barrier of sheer cliffs crowned with pine and hemlock. But the interesting section of the landscape lay almost directly in front of me—a rent in the mountain-wall through which appeared to run a level, arid plain, miles wide, and as smooth and even as a highroad.

There could be no doubt concerning the significance of that rent in the solid mountain-wall; and, moreover, it was exactly as William Spike had described it. However, I called to him and he came up from the smoky camp-fire, axe on shoulder.

"Yep," he said, squatting beside me; "the Graham Glacier used to meander through that there hole, but somethin' went wrong with the earth's in'ards an' there was a bust-up."

"And you saw it, William?" I said, with a sigh of envy.

"Hey? Seen it? Sure I seen it! I was to Spoutin' Springs, twenty mile west, with a bale o' blue fox an' otter pelt. Fust I knew them geysers begun for to groan egregious like, an' I seen the caribou gallopin' hell-bent south. 'This climate,' sez I, 'is too bracin' for me,' so I struck a back trail an' landed onto a hill. Then them geysers blowed up, one arter the next, an' I heard somethin' kinder cave in between here an' China. I disremember things what happened. Somethin' throwed me down, but I couldn't stay there, for the blamed ground was runnin' like a river—all wavy-like, an' the sky hit me on the back o' me head."

"And then?" I urged, in that new excitement which every repetition of the story revived. I had heard it all twenty times since we left New York, but mere repetition could not apparently satisfy me.

"Then," continued William, "the whole world kinder went off like a fire-cracker, an' I come too, an' ran like—"

"I know," said I, cutting him short, for I had become wearied of the invariable profanity which lent a lurid ending to his narrative.

"After that," I continued, "you went through the rent in the mountains?"

"Sure."

"And you saw a dingue and a creature that resembled a mammoth?"

"Sure," he repeated, sulkily.

"And you saw something else?" I always asked this question; it fascinated me to see the sullen fright flicker in William's eyes, and the mechanical backward glance, as though what he had seen might still be behind him.

He had never answered this third question but once, and that time he fairly snarled in my face as he growled: "I seen what no Christian oughter see."

So when I repeated: "And you saw something else, William?" he gave me a wicked, frightened leer, and shuffled off to feed the mules. Flattery, entreaties, threats left him unmoved; he never told me what the third thing was that he had seen behind the Hudson Mountains.

William had retired to mix up with his mules; I resumed my binoculars and my silent inspection of the great, smooth path left by the Graham Glacier when something or other exploded that vast mass of ice into vapor.

The arid plain wound out from the unknown country like a river, and I thought then, and think now, that when the glacier was blown into vapor the vapor descended in the most terrific rain the world has ever seen, and poured through the newly blasted mountain-gateway, sweeping the earth to bed-rock. To corroborate this theory, miles to the southward I could see the débris winding out across the land towards Wellman Bay, but as the terminal moraine of the vanished glacier formerly ended there I could not be certain that my theory was correct. Owing to the formation of the mountains I could not see more than half a mile into the unknown country. What I could see appeared to be nothing but the continuation of the glacier's path, scored out by the cloud-burst, and swept as smooth as a floor.

Sitting there, my heart beating heavily with excitement, I looked through the evening glow at the endless, pine-crowned mountain-wall with its giant's gateway pierced for me! And I thought of all the explorers and the unknown heroes—trappers, Indians, humble naturalists, perhaps—who had attempted to scale that sheer barricade and had died there or failed, beaten back from those eternal cliffs. Eternal? No! For the Eternal Himself had struck the rock, and it had sprung asunder, thundering obedience.

In the still evening air the smoke from the fire below mounted in a straight, slender pillar, like the smoke from those ancient altars builded before the first blood had been shed on earth.

The evening wind stirred the pines; a tiny spring brook made thin harmony among the rocks; a murmur came from the quiet camp. It was William adjuring his mules. In the deepening twilight I descended the hillock, stepping cautiously among the rocks.

Then, suddenly, as I stood outside the reddening ring of firelight, far in the depths of the unknown country, far behind the mountain-wall, a sound grew on the quiet air. William heard it and turned his face to the mountains. The sound faded to a vibration which was felt, not heard. Then once more I began to divine a vibration in the air, gathering in distant volume until it became a sound, lasting the space of a spoken word, fading to vibration, then silence.

Was it a cry?

I looked at William inquiringly. He had quietly fainted away.

I got him to the little brook and poked his head into the icy water, and after a while he sat up pluckily.

To an indignant question he replied: "Naw, I ain't a-cussin' you. Lemme be or I'll have fits."

"Was it that sound that scared you?" I asked.

"Ya-as," he replied with a dauntless shiver.

"Was it the voice of the mammoth?" I persisted, excitedly. "Speak, William, or I'll drag you about and kick you!"

He replied that it was neither a mammoth nor a dingue, and added a strong request for privacy, which I was obliged to grant, as I could not torture another word out of him.

I slept little that night; the exciting proximity of the unknown land was too much for me. But although I lay awake for hours, I heard nothing except the tinkle of water among the rocks and the plover calling from some hidden marsh. At daybreak I shot a ptarmigan which had walked into camp, and the shot set the echoes yelling among the mountains.

William, sullen and heavy-eyed, dressed the bird, and we broiled it for breakfast.

Neither he nor I alluded to the sound we had heard the night before; he boiled water and cleaned up the mess-kit, and I pottered about among the rocks for another ptarmigan. Wearying of this, presently, I returned to the mules and William, and sat down for a smoke.

"It strikes me," I said, "that our instructions to 'await further orders' are idiotic. How are we to receive 'further orders' here?"

William did not know.

"You don't suppose," said I, in sudden disgust, "that Miss Smawl believes there is a summer hotel and daily mail service in the Hudson Mountains?"

William thought perhaps she did suppose something of the sort.

It irritated me beyond measure to find myself at last on the very border of the unknown country, and yet checked, held back, by the irresponsible orders of a maiden lady named Smawl. However, my salary depended upon the whim of that maiden lady, and although I fussed and fumed and glared at the mountains through my glasses, I realized that I could not stir without the permission of Miss Smawl. At times this grotesque situation became almost unbearable, and I often went away by myself and indulged in fantasies, firing my gun off and pretending I had hit Miss Smawl by mistake. At such moments I would imagine I was free at last to plunge into the strange country, and I would squat on a rock and dream of bagging my first mammoth.

The time passed heavily; the tension increased with each new day. I shot ptarmigan and kept our table supplied with brook-trout. William chopped wood, conversed with his mules, and cooked very badly.

"See here," I said, one morning; "we have been in camp a week to-day, and I can't stand your cooking another minute!"

William, who was washing a saucepan, looked up and begged me sarcastically to accept the *cordon bleu*. But I know only how to cook eggs, and there were no eggs within some hundred miles.

To get the flavor of the breakfast out of my mouth I walked up to my favorite hillock and sat down for a smoke. The next moment, however, I was on my feet, cheering excitedly and shouting for William.

"Here come 'further instructions' at last!" I cried, pointing to the southward, where two dots on the grassy plain were imperceptibly moving in our direction.

"People on mules," said William, without enthusiasm.

"They must be messengers for us!" I cried, in chaste joy. "Three cheers for the northward trail, William, and the mischief take Miss— Well, never mind now," I added.

"On them approachin' mules," observed William, "there is wimmen."

I stared at him for a second, then attempted to strike him. He dodged wearily and repeated his incredible remark: "Ya-as, there is—wimmen—two female ladies onto them there mules."

"Bring me my glasses!" I said, hoarsely; "bring me those glasses, William, because I shall destroy you if you don't!"

Somewhat awed by my calm fury, he hastened back to camp and returned with the binoculars. It was a breathless moment. I adjusted the lenses with a steady hand and raised them.

Now, of all unexpected sights my fate may reserve for me in the future, I trust—nay, I know—that none can ever prove as unwelcome as the sight I perceived through my binoculars. For upon the backs of those distant mules were two women, and the first one was Miss Smawl!

Upon her head she wore a helmet, from which fluttered a green veil. Otherwise she was clothed in tweeds; and at moments she beat upon her mule with a thick umbrella.

Surfeited with the sickening spectacle, I sat down on a rock and tried to cry.

"I told yer so," observed William; but I was too tired to attack him.

When the caravan rode into camp I was myself again, smilingly prepared for the worst, and I advanced, cap in hand, followed furtively by William.

"Welcome," I said, violently injecting joy into my voice. "Welcome, Professor Smawl, to the Hudson Mountains!"

"Kindly take my mule," she said, climbing down to mother earth.

"William," I said, with dignity, "take the lady's mule."

Miss Smawl gave me a stolid glance, then made directly for the campfire, where a kettle of game-broth simmered over the coals. The last I saw of her she was smelling of it, and I turned my back and advanced towards the second lady pilgrim, prepared to be civil until snubbed.

Now, it is quite certain that never before had William Spike or I beheld so much feminine loveliness in one human body on the back of a mule. She was clad in the daintiest of shooting-kilts, yet there was nothing mannish about her except the way she rode the mule, and that only accentuated her adorable femininity.

I remembered what Professor Lesard had said about blue stockings—but Miss Dorothy Van Twiller's were gray, turned over at the tops, and disappearing into canvas spats buckled across a pair of slim shooting-boots.

"Welcome," said I, attempting to restrain a too violent cordiality. "Welcome, Professor Van Twiller, to the Hudson Mountains."

"Thank you," she replied, accepting my assistance very sweetly; "it is a pleasure to meet a human being again."

I glanced at Miss Smawl. She was eating game-broth, but she resembled a human being in a general way.

"I should very much like to wash my hands," said Professor Van Twiller, drawing the buckskin gloves from her slim fingers.

I brought towels and soap and conducted her to the brook.

She called to Professor Smawl to join her, and her voice was crystalline; Professor Smawl declined, and her voice was batrachian.

"She is so hungry!" observed Miss Van Twiller. "I am very thankful we are here at last, for we've had a horrid time. You see, we neither of us know how to cook."

I wondered what they would say to William's cooking, but I held my peace and retired, leaving the little brook to mirror the sweetest face that was ever bathed in water.

VIII

That afternoon our expedition, in two sections, moved forward. The first section comprised myself and all the mules; the second section was commanded by Professor Smawl, followed by Professor Van Twiller, armed with a tiny shot-gun. William, loaded down with the ladies' toilet articles, skulked in the rear. I say skulked; there was no other word for it.

"So you're a guide, are you?" observed Professor Smawl when William, cap in hand, had approached her with well-meant advice. "The woods are full of lazy guides. Pick up those Gladstone bags! I'll do the guiding for this expedition."

Made cautious by William's humiliation, I associated with the mules exclusively. Nevertheless, Professor Smawl had her hard eyes on me, and I realized she meant mischief.

The encounter took place just as I, driving the five mules, entered the great mountain gateway, thrilled with anticipation which almost amounted to foreboding. As I was about to set foot across the imaginary frontier which divided the world from the unknown land, Professor Smawl hailed me and I halted until she came up.

"As commander of this expedition," she said, somewhat out of breath, "I desire to be the first living creature who has ever set foot behind the Graham Glacier. Kindly step aside, young sir!"

"Madam," said I, rigid with disappointment, "my guide, William Spike, entered that unknown land a year ago."

"He *says* he did," sneered Professor Smawl.

"As you like," I replied; "but it is scarcely generous to forestall the person whose stupidity gave you the clew to this unexplored region."

"You mean yourself?" she asked, with a stony stare.

"I do," said I, firmly.

Her little, hard eyes grew harder, and she clutched her umbrella until the steel ribs crackled.

"Young man," she said, insolently; "if I could have gotten rid of you I should have done so the day I was appointed president. But Professor Farrago refused to resign unless your position was assured, subject, of course, to your good behavior. Frankly, I don't like you, and I consider your views on science ridiculous, and if an opportunity presents itself I will be most happy to request your resignation. Kindly collect your mules and follow me."

Mortified beyond measure, I collected my mules and followed my president into the strange country behind the Hudson Mountains—I who had aspired to lead, compelled to follow in the rear, driving mules.

The journey was monotonous at first, but we shortly ascended a ridge from which we could see, stretching out below us, the wilderness where, save the feet of William Spike, no human feet had passed.

As for me, tingling with enthusiasm, I forgot my chagrin, I forgot the gross injustice, I forgot my mules. "Excelsior!" I cried, running up and down the ridge in uncontrollable excitement at the sublime spectacle of forest, mountain, and valley all set with little lakes.

"Excelsior!" repeated an excited voice at my side, and Professor Van Twiller sprang to the ridge beside me, her eyes bright as stars.

Exalted, inspired by the mysterious beauty of the view, we clasped hands and ran up and down the grassy ridge.

"That will do," said Professor Smawl, coldly, as we raced about like a pair of distracted kittens. The chilling voice broke the spell; I dropped Professor Van Twiller's hand and sat down on a bowlder, aching with wrath.

Late that afternoon we halted beside a tiny lake, deep in the unknown wilderness, where purple and scarlet bergamot choked the shores and the spruce-partridge strutted fearlessly under our very feet. Here we pitched our two tents. The afternoon sun slanted through the pines; the lake glittered; acres of golden brake perfumed the forest silence, broken only at rare intervals by the distant thunder of a partridge drumming.

Professor Smawl ate heavily and retired to her tent to lie torpid until evening. William drove the unloaded mules into an intervale full of sun-cured, fragrant grasses; I sat down beside Professor Van Twiller.

The wilderness is electric. Once within the influence of its currents, human beings become positively or negatively charged, violently attracting or repelling each other.

"There is something the matter with this air," said Professor Van Twiller. "It makes me feel as though I were desperately enamoured of the entire human race."

She leaned back against a pine, smiling vaguely, and crossing one knee over the other.

Now I am not bold by temperament, and, normally, I fear ladies. Therefore it surprised me to hear myself begin a frivolous *causerie,* replying to her pretty epigrams with epigrams of my own, advancing to the borderland of badinage, fearlessly conducting her and myself over that delicate frontier to meet upon the terrain of undisguised flirtation.

It was clear that she was out for a holiday. The seriousness and restraints of twenty-two years she had left behind her in the civilized world, and now, with a shrug of her young shoulders, she unloosened her burden of reticence, dignity, and responsibility and let the whole load fall with a discreet thud.

"Even hares go mad in March," she said, seriously. "I know you intend to flirt with me—and I don't care. Anyway, there's nothing else to do, is there?"

"Suppose," said I solemnly, "I should take you behind that big tree and attempt to kiss you!"

The prospect did not appear to appall her, so I looked around with that sneaking yet conciliatory caution peculiar to young men who are novices in the art. Before I had satisfied myself that neither William nor the mules were observing us, Professor Van Twiller rose to her feet and took a short step backward.

"Let's set traps for a dingue," she said, "will you?"

I looked at the big tree, undecided. "Come on," she said; "I'll show you how." And away we went into the woods, she leading, her kilts flashing through the golden half-light.

Now I had not the faintest notion how to trap the dingue, but Professor Van Twiller asserted that it formerly fed on the tender tips of the spruce, quoting Darwin as her authority.

So we gathered a bushel of spruce-tips, piled them on the bank of a little stream, then built a miniature stockade around the bait, a foot high. I roofed this with hemlock, then laboriously whittled out and adjusted a swinging shutter for the entrance, setting it on springy twigs.

"The dingue, you know, was supposed to live in the water," she said, kneeling beside me over our trap.

I took her little hand and thanked her for the information.

"Doubtless," she said, enthusiastically, "a dingue will come out of the lake to-night to feed on our spruce-tips. Then," she added, "we've got him."

"True!" I said, earnestly, and pressed her fingers very gently.

Her face was turned a little away; I don't remember what she said; I don't remember that she said anything. A faint rose-tint stole over her cheek. A few moments later she said: "You must not do that again."

It was quite late when we strolled back to camp. Long before we came in sight of the twin tents we heard a deep voice bawling our names. It was Professor Smawl, and she pounced upon Dorothy and drove her ignominiously into the tent.

"As for you," she said, in hollow tones, "you may explain your conduct at once, or place your resignation at my disposal."

But somehow or other I appeared to be temporarily lost to shame, and I only smiled at my infuriated president, and entered my own tent with a step that was distinctly frolicsome.

"Billy," said I to William Spike, who regarded me morosely from the depths of the tent, "I'm going out to bag a mammoth to-morrow, so kindly clean my elephant-gun and bring an axe to chop out the tusks."

That night Professor Smawl complained bitterly of the cooking, but as neither Dorothy nor I knew how to improve it, she revenged herself on us by eating everything on the table and retiring to bed, taking Dorothy with her.

I could not sleep very well; the mosquitoes were intrusive, and Professor Smawl dreamed she was a pack of wolves and yelped in her sleep.

"Bird, ain't she?" said William, roused from slumber by her weird noises.

Dorothy, much frightened, crawled out of her tent, where her blanket-mate still dreamed dyspeptically, and William and I made her comfortable by the camp-fire.

It takes a pretty girl to look pretty half asleep in a blanket.

"Are you sure you are quite well?" I asked her.

To make sure, I tested her pulse. For an hour it varied more or less, but without alarming either of us. Then she went back to bed and I sat alone by the campfire.

Towards midnight I suddenly began to feel that strange, distant vibration that I had once before felt. As before, the vibration grew on the still air, increasing in volume until it became a sound, then died out into silence.

I rose and stole into my tent.

William, white as death, lay in his corner, weeping in his sleep.

I roused him remorselessly, and he sat up scowling, but refused to tell me what he had been dreaming.

"Was it about that third thing you saw—" I began. But he snarled up at me like a startled animal, and I was obliged to go to bed and toss about and speculate.

The next morning it rained. Dorothy and I visited our dingue-trap but found nothing in it. We were inclined, however, to stay out in the rain behind a big tree, but Professor Smawl vetoed that proposition and sent me off to supply the larder with fresh meat.

I returned, mad and wet, with a dozen partridges and a white hare—brown at that season—and William cooked them vilely.

"I can taste the feathers!" said Professor Smawl, indignantly.

"There is no accounting for taste," I said, with a polite gesture of deprecation; "personally, I find feathers unpalatable."

"You may hand in your resignation this evening!" cried Professor Smawl, in hollow tones of passion.

I passed her the pancakes with a cheerful smile, and flippantly pressed the hand next me. Unexpectedly it proved to be William's sticky fist, and Dorothy and I laughed until her tears ran into Professor Smawl's coffee-cup—an accident which kindled her wrath to red heat, and she requested my resignation five times during the evening.

The next day it rained again, more or less. Professor Smawl complained of the cooking, demanded my resignation, and finally marched out to explore, lugging the reluctant William with her. Dorothy and I sat down behind the largest tree we could find.

I don't remember what we were saying when a peculiar sound interrupted us, and we listened earnestly.

It was like a bell in the woods, ding-dong! ding-dong! ding-dong!—a low, mellow, golden harmony, coming nearer, then stopping.

I clasped Dorothy in my arms in excitement.

"It is the note of the dingue!" I whispered, "and that explains its name, handed down from remote ages along with the names of the behemoth and the coney. It was because of its bell-like cry that it was named! Darling!" I cried, forgetting our short acquaintance, "we have made a discovery that the whole world will ring with!"

Hand in hand we tiptoed through the forest to our trap. There was something in it that took fright at our approach and rushed panic-stricken round and round the interior of the trap, uttering its alarm-note, which sounded like the jangling of a whole string of bells.

I seized the strangely beautiful creature; it neither attempted to bite nor scratch, but crouched in my arms, trembling and eyeing me.

Delighted with the lovely, tame animal, we bore it tenderly back to the camp and placed it on my blanket. Hand in hand we stood before it, awed by the sight of this beast, so long believed to be extinct.

"It is too good to be true," sighed Dorothy, clasping her white hands under her chin and gazing at the dingue in rapture.

"Yes," said I, solemnly, "you and I, my child, are face to face with the fabled dingue—*Dingus solitarius!* Let us continue to gaze at it, reverently, prayerfully, humbly—"

Dorothy yawned—probably with excitement.

We were still mutely adoring the dingue when Professor Smawl burst into the tent at a hand-gallop, bawling hoarsely for her kodak and note-book.

Dorothy seized her triumphantly by the arm and pointed at the dingue, which appeared to be frightened to death.

"What!" cried Professor Smawl, scornfully; "*that* a dingue? Rubbish!"

"Madam," I said, firmly, "it is a dingue! It's a monodactyl! See! It has but a single toe!"

"Bosh!" she retorted; "it's got four!"

"Four!" I repeated, blankly.

"Yes; one on each foot!"

"Of course," I said; "you didn't suppose a monodactyl meant a beast with one leg and one toe!"

But she laughed hatefully and declared it was a woodchuck.

We squabbled for a while until I saw the significance of her attitude. The unfortunate woman wished to find a dingue first and be accredited with the discovery.

I lifted the dingue in both hands and shook the creature gently, until the chiming ding-dong of its protestations filled our ears like sweet bells jangled out of tune.

Pale with rage at this final proof of the dingue's identity, she seized her camera and note-book.

"I haven't any time to waste over that musical woodchuck!" she shouted, and bounced out of the tent.

"What have you discovered, dear?" cried Dorothy, running after her.

"A mammoth!" bawled Professor Smawl, triumphantly; "and I'm going to photograph him!"

Neither Dorothy nor I believed her. We watched the flight of the infatuated woman in silence.

And now, at last, the tragic shadow falls over my paper as I write. I was never passionately attached to professor Smawl, yet I would gladly refrain from chronicling the episode that must follow if, as I have hitherto attempted, I succeed in sticking to the unornamented truth.

I have said that neither Dorothy nor I believed her. I don't know why, unless it was that we had not yet made up our minds to believe that the mammoth still existed on earth. So, when Professor Smawl disappeared in the forest, scuttling through the underbrush like a demoralized hen, we viewed her flight with unconcern. There was a large tree in the neighborhood—a pleasant shelter in case of rain. So we sat down behind it, although the sun was shining fiercely.

It was one of those peaceful afternoons in the wilderness when the whole forest dreams, and the shadows are asleep and every little leaflet takes a nap. Under the still tree-tops the dappled sunlight, motionless, soaked the sod; the forest-flies no longer whirled in circles, but sat sunning their wings on slender twig-tips.

The heat was sweet and spicy; the sun drew out the delicate essence of gum and sap, warming volatile juices until they exhaled through the aromatic bark.

The sun went down into the wilderness; the forest stirred in its sleep; a fish splashed in the lake. The spell was broken. Presently the wind began to rise somewhere far away in the unknown land. I heard it coming, nearer, nearer—a brisk wind that grew heavier and blew harder as it neared us—a gale that swept distant branches—a furious gale that set limbs clashing and cracking, nearer and nearer. Crack! and the gale grew to a hurricane, trampling trees like dead twigs! Crack! Crackle! Crash! Crash!

Was it the wind?

With the roaring in my ears I sprang up, staring into the forest vista, and at the same instant, out of the crashing forest, sped Professor Smawl, skirts tucked up, thin legs flying like bicycle-spokes. I shouted, but the crashing drowned my voice. Then all at once the solid earth began to shake, and with the rush and roar of a tornado a gigantic living thing burst out of the forest before our eyes—a vast shadowy bulk that rocked and rolled along, mowing down trees in its course.

Two great crescents of ivory curved from its head; its back swept through the tossing tree-tops. Once it bellowed like a gun fired from a high bastion.

The apparition passed with the noise of thunder rolling on towards the ends of the earth. Crack! crash! went the trees, the tempest swept away in a rolling volley of reports, distant, more distant, until, long after the tumult had deadened, then ceased, the stunned forest echoed with the fall of mangled branches slowly dropping.

That evening an agitated young couple sat close together in the deserted camp, calling timidly at intervals for Professor Smawl and William Spike. I say timidly, because it is correct; we did not care to have a mammoth respond to our calls. The lurking echoes across the lake answered our cries; the full moon came up over the forest to look at us. We were not much to look at. Dorothy was moistening my shoulder with unfeigned tears, and I, afraid to light the fire, sat hunched up under the common blanket, wildly examining the darkness around us.

Chilled to the spinal marrow, I watched the gray lights whiten in the east. A single bird awoke in the wilderness. I saw the nearer trees looming in the mist, and the silver fog rolling on the lake.

All night long the darkness had vibrated with the strange monotone which I had heard the first night, camping at the gate of the unknown land. My brain seemed to echo that subtle harmony which rings in the auricular labyrinth after sound has ceased.

There are ghosts of sound which return to haunt long after sound is dead. It was these voiceless spectres of a voice long dead that stirred the transparent silence, intoning toneless tones.

I think I made myself clear.

It was an uncanny night; morning whitened the east; gray daylight stole into the woods, blotting the shadows to paler tints. It was nearly midday before the sun became visible through the fine-spun web of mist—a pale spot of gilt in the zenith.

By this pallid light I labored to strike the two empty tents, gather up our equipments and pack them on our five mules. Dorothy aided me bravely, whimpering when I spoke of Professor Smawl and William Spike, but abating nothing of her industry until we had the mules loaded and I was ready to drive them, Heaven knows whither.

"Where shall we go?" quavered Dorothy, sitting on a log with the dingue in her lap.

One thing was certain; this mammoth-ridden land was no place for women, and I told her so.

We placed the dingue in a basket and tied it around the leading mule's neck. Immediately the dingue, alarmed, began dingling like a cow-bell. It acted like a charm on the other mules, and they gravely filed off after their leader, following the bell. Dorothy and I, hand in hand, brought up the rear.

I shall never forget that scene in the forest—the gray arch of the heavens swimming in mist through which the sun peered shiftily, the tall pines wavering through the fog, the preoccupied mules marching single file, the foggy bell-note of the gentle dingue in its swinging basket, and Dorothy, limp kilts dripping with dew, plodding through the white dusk.

We followed the terrible tornado-path which the mammoth had left in its wake, but there were no traces of its human victims—neither one jot of Professor Smawl nor one solitary tittle of William Spike.

And now I would be glad to end this chapter if I could; I would gladly leave myself as I was, there in the misty forest, with an arm encircling the slender body of my little companion, and the mules moving in a monotonous line, and the dingue discreetly jingling—but again that menacing shadow falls across my page, and truth bids me tell all, and I, the slave of accuracy, must remember my vows as the dauntless disciple of truth.

Towards sunset—or that pale parody of sunset which set the forest swimming in a ghastly, colorless haze—the mammoth's trail of ruin brought us suddenly out of the trees to the shore of a great sheet of water.

It was a desolate spot; northward a chaos of sombre peaks rose, piled up like thunder-clouds along the horizon; east and south the darkening wilderness spread like a pall. Westward, crawling out into the mist from our very feet, the gray waste of water moved under the dull sky, and flat waves slapped the squatting rocks, heavy with slime.

And now I understood why the trail of the mammoth continued straight into the lake, for on either hand black, filthy tamarack swamps lay under ghostly sheets of mist. I strove to creep out into the bog, seeking a footing, but the swamp quaked and the smooth surface trembled like jelly in a bowl. A stick thrust into the slime sank into unknown depths.

Vaguely alarmed, I gained the firm land again and looked around, believing there was no road open but the desolate trail we had traversed. But I was in error; already the leading mule was wading out into the water, and the others, one by one, followed.

How wide the lake might be we could not tell, because the band of fog hung across the water like a curtain. Yet out into this flat, shallow void our mules went steadily, slop! slop! slop! in single file. Already they were growing indistinct in the fog, so I bade Dorothy hasten and take off her shoes and stockings.

She was ready before I was, I having to unlace my shooting-boots, and she stepped out into the water, kilts fluttering, moving her white feet cautiously. In a moment I was beside her, and we waded forward, sounding the shallow water with our poles.

When the water had risen to Dorothy's knees I hesitated, alarmed. But when we attempted to retrace our steps we could not find the shore again, for the blank mist shrouded everything, and the water deepened at every step.

I halted and listened for the mules. Far away in the fog I heard a dull splashing, receding as I listened. After a while all sound died away, and a slow horror stole over me—a horror that froze the little net-work of veins in every limb. A step to the right and the water rose to my knees; a step to the left and the cold, thin circle of the flood chilled my breast. Suddenly Dorothy screamed, and the next moment a far cry answered—a far, sweet cry that seemed to come from the sky, like the rushing harmony of the world's swift winds. Then the curtain of fog before us lighted up from behind; shadows moved on the misty screen, outlines of trees and grassy shores, and tiny birds flying. Thrown on the vapory curtain, in silhouette, a man and a woman passed under the lovely trees, arms about each other's necks; near them the shadows of five mules grazed peacefully; a dingue gambolled by.

"It is a mirage!" I muttered, but my voice made no sound. Slowly the light behind the fog died out; the vapor around us turned to rose, then dissolved, while mile on mile of a limitless sea spread away till, like a quick line pencilled at a stroke, the horizon cut sky and sea in half, and before us lay an ocean from which towered a mountain of snow—or a gigantic berg of milky ice—for it was moving.

"Good Heavens," I shrieked; "it is alive!"

At the sound of my crazed cry the mountain of snow became a pillar, towering to the clouds, and a wave of golden glory drenched the figure to its knees! Figure? Yes—for a colossal arm shot across the sky, then curved back in exquisite grace to a head of awful beauty—a woman's head, with eyes like the blue lake of heaven—ay, a woman's splendid form, upright from the sky to the earth, knee-deep in the sea. The evening clouds drifted across her brow; her shimmering hair lighted the world beneath with sunset. Then, shading her white brow with one hand, she bent, and, with the other hand dipped in the sea, she sent a wave rolling at us. Straight out of the horizon it sped—a ripple that grew to a wave, then to a furious breaker which caught us up in a whirl of foam, bearing us onward, faster, faster, swiftly flying through leagues of spray until consciousness ceased and all was blank.

Yet ere my senses fled I heard again that strange cry—that sweet, thrilling harmony rushing out over the foaming waters, filling earth and sky with its soundless vibrations.

And I knew it was the hail of the Spirit of the North warning us back to life again.

* * *

Looking back, now, over the days that passed before we staggered into the Hudson Bay outpost at Gravel Cove, I am inclined to believe that neither Dorothy nor I were clothed entirely in our proper minds—or, if we were, our minds, no doubt, must have been in the same condition as our clothing. I remember shooting ptarmigan, and that we ate them; flashes of memory recall the steady downpour of rain through the endless twilight of shaggy forests; dim days on the foggy tundra, mud-holes from which the wild ducks rose in thousands; then the stunted hemlocks, then the forest again. And I do not even recall the moment when, at last, stumbling into the smooth path left by the Graham Glacier, we crawled through the mountain-wall, out of the unknown land, and once more into a world protected by the Lord Almighty.

A hunting-party of Elbon Indians brought us in to the post, and everybody was most kind—that I remember, just before going into several weeks of unpleasant delirium mercifully mitigated with unconsciousness.

Curiously enough, Professor Van Twiller was not very much battered, physically, for I had carried her for days, pickaback. But the awful experience had produced a shock which resulted in a nervous condition that lasted so long after she returned to New York that the wealthy and eminent specialist who attended her insisted upon taking her to the Riviera and marrying her. I sometimes wonder—but, as I have said, such reflections have no place in these austere pages.

However, anybody, I fancy, is at liberty to speculate upon the fate of the late Professor Smawl and William Spike, and upon the mules and the gentle dingue. Personally, I am convinced that the suggestive silhouettes I saw on that ghastly curtain of fog were cast by beatified beings in some earthly paradise—a mirage of bliss of which we caught but the colorless shadow-shapes floating 'twixt sea and sky.

At all events, neither Professor Smawl nor her William Spike ever returned; no exploring expedition has found a trace of mule or lady, of William or the dingue. The new expedition to be organized by Barnard College may penetrate still farther. I suppose that, when the time comes, I shall be expected to volunteer. But Professor Van Twiller is married, and William and Professor Smawl ought to be, and altogether, considering the mammoth and that gigantic and splendid apparition that bent from the zenith to the ocean and sent a tidal-wave rolling from the palm of one white hand—I say, taking all these various matters under consideration, I think I shall decide to remain in New York and continue writing for the scientific periodicals. Besides, the mortifying experience at the Paris Exposition has dampened even my perennially youthful enthusiasm. And as for the late expedition to Florida, Heaven knows I am ready to repeat it—nay, I am already forming a plan for the rescue—but though I am prepared to encounter any danger for the sake of my beloved superior, Professor Farrago, I do not feel inclined to commit indiscretions in order to pry into secrets which, as I regard it, concern Professor Smawl and William Spike alone.

But all this is, in a measure, premature. What I now have to relate is the recital of an eye-witness to that most astonishing scandal which occurred during the recent exposition in Paris.

IX

When the delegates were appointed to the International Scientific Congress at the Paris Exposition of 1900, how little did anybody imagine that the great conference would end in the most gigantic scandal that ever stirred two continents?

Yet, had it not been for the pair of American newspapers published in Paris, this scandal would never have been aired, for the continental press is so well muzzled that when it bites its teeth merely meet in the empty atmosphere with a discreet snap.

But to the Yankee nothing excepting the Monroe Doctrine is sacred, and the unsopped watch-dogs of the press bite right and left, unmuzzled. The biter bites—it is his profession—and that ends the affair; the bitee is bitten, and, in the deplorable argot of the hour, "it is up to him."

So now that the scandal has been well aired and hung out to dry in the teeth of decency and the four winds, and as all the details have been cheerfully and grossly exaggerated, it is, perhaps, the proper moment for the truth to be written by the only person whose knowledge of all the facts in the affair entitles him to speak for himself as well as for those honorable ladies and gentlemen whose names and titles have been so mercilessly criticised.

These, then, are the simple facts:

The International Scientific Congress, now adjourned *sine die,* met at nine o'clock in the morning, May 3, 1900, in the Tasmanian Pavilion of the Paris Exposition. There were present the most famous scientists of Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy, Switzerland, and the United States.

His Royal Highness the Crown-Prince of Monaco presided.

It is not necessary, now, to repeat the details of that preliminary meeting. It is sufficient to say that committees representing the various known sciences were named and appointed by the Prince of Monaco, who had been unanimously elected permanent chairman of the conference. It is the composition of a single committee that concerns us now, and that committee, representing the science which treats of bird life, was made up as follows:

Chairman—His Royal Highness the Crown-Prince of Monaco. Members—Sir Peter Grebe, Great Britain; Baron de Becasse, France; his Royal Highness King Christian, of Finland; the Countess d'Alzette, of Belgium; and I, from the United States, representing the Smithsonian Institution and the Bronx Park Zoological Society of New York.

This, then, was the composition of that now notorious ornithological committee, a modest, earnest, self-effacing little band of workers, bound together—in the beginning—by those ties of mutual respect and esteem which unite all laborers in the vineyard of science.

From the first meeting of our committee, science, the great leveller, left no artificial barriers of rank or title standing between us. We were enthusiasts in our love for ornithology; we found new inspiration in the democracy of our common interests.

As for me, I chatted with my fellows, feeling no restraint myself and perceiving none. The King of Finland and I discussed his latest monograph on the speckled titmouse, and I was glad to agree with the King in all his theories concerning the nesting habits of that important bird.

Sir Peter Grebe, a large, red gentleman in tweeds, read us some notes he had made on the domestic hen and her reasons for running ahead of a horse and wagon instead of stepping aside to let the disturbing vehicle pass.

The Crown-Prince of Monaco took issue with Sir Peter; so did the Baron de Becasse; and we were entertained by a friendly and marvellously interesting three-cornered dispute, shared in by three of the most profound thinkers of the century.

I shall never forget the brilliancy of that argument, nor the modest, good-humored retorts which gave us all a glimpse into depths of erudition which impressed us profoundly and set the seal on the bonds which held us so closely together.

Alas, that the seal should ever have been broken! Alas, that the glittering apple of discord should have been flung into our midst!—no, not flung, but gently rolled under our noses by the gloved fingers of the lovely Countess d'Alzette.

"Messieurs," said the fair Countess, when all present, excepting she and I, had touched upon or indicated the subjects which they had prepared to present to the congress—"messieurs mes confrères, I have been requested by our distinguished chairman, the Crown-Prince of Monaco, to submit to your judgment the subject which, by favor of the King of the Belgians, I have prepared to present to the International Scientific Congress."

She made a pretty courtesy as she named her own sovereign, and we all rose out of respect to that most austere and moral ruler the King of Belgium.

"But," she said, with a charming smile of depreciation, "I am very, very much afraid that the subject which I have chosen may not meet with your approval, gentlemen."

She stood there in her dainty Parisian gown and bonnet, shaking her pretty head uncertainly, a smile on her lips, her small, gloved fingers interlocked.

"Oh, I know how dreadful it would be if this great congress should be compelled to listen to any hoax like that which Monsieur de Rougemont imposed on the British Royal Society," she said, gravely; "and because the subject of my paper is as strange as the strangest phenomenon alleged to have been noted by Monsieur de Rougemont, I hesitate—"

She glanced at the silent listeners around her. Sir Peter's red face had hardened; the King of Finland frowned slightly; the Crown-Prince of Monaco and Baron de Becasse wore anxious smiles. But when her violet eyes met mine I gave her a glance of encouragement, and that glance, I am forced to confess, was not dictated by scientific approval, but by something that never entirely dries up in the mustiest and dustiest of savants—the old Adam implanted in us all.

Now, I knew perfectly well what her subject must be; so did every man present. For it was no secret that his Majesty of Belgium had been swindled by some natives in Tasmania, and had paid a very large sum of money for a skin of that gigantic bird, the ux, which has been so often reported to exist among the inaccessible peaks of the Tasmanian Mountains. Needless, perhaps, to say that the skin proved a fraud, being nothing more than a Barnum contrivance made up out of the skins of a dozen ostriches and cassowaries, and most cleverly put together by Chinese workmen; at least, such was the report made on it by Sir Peter Grebe, who had been sent by the British Society to Antwerp to examine the acquisition. Needless, also, perhaps, to say that King Leopold, of Belgium, stoutly maintained that the skin of the ux was genuine from beak to claw.

For six months there had been a most serious difference of opinion among European ornithologists concerning the famous ux in the Antwerp Museum; and this difference had promised to result in an open quarrel between a few Belgian savants on one side and all Europe and Great Britain on the other.

Scientists have a deep-rooted horror of anything that touches on charlatanism; the taint of trickery not only alarms them, but drives them away from any suspicious subject, and usually ruins, scientifically speaking, the person who has introduced the subject for discussion.

Therefore, it took no little courage for the Countess d'Alzette to touch, with her dainty gloves, a subject which every scientist in Europe, with scarcely an exception, had pronounced fraudulent and unworthy of investigation. And to bring it before the great International Congress required more courage still; for the person who could face, in executive session, the most brilliant intellects in the world, and openly profess faith in a Barnumized bird skin, either had no scientific reputation to lose or was possessed of a bravery far above that of the savants who composed the audience.

Now, when the pretty Countess caught a flash of encouragement in my glance she turned rosy with gratification and surprise. Clearly, she had not expected to find a single ally in the entire congress. Her quick smile of gratitude touched me, and made me ashamed, too, for I had encouraged her out of the pure love of mischief, hoping to hear the whole matter threshed before the congress and so have it settled once for all. It was a thoughtless thing to do on my part. I should have remembered the consequences to the Countess if it were proven that she had been championing a fraud. The ruffled dignity of the congress would never forgive her; her scientific career would practically be at an end, because her theories and observations could no longer command respect or even the attention of those who knew that she herself had once been deceived by a palpable fraud.

I looked at her guiltily, already ashamed of myself for encouraging her to her destruction. How lovely and innocent she appeared, standing there reading her notes in a low, clear voice, fresh as a child's, with now and then a delicious upward sweep of her long, dark lashes.

With a start I came to my senses and bestowed a pinch on myself. This was neither the time nor the place to sentimentalize over a girlish beauty whose small, Parisian head was crammed full of foolish, brave theories concerning an imposition which her aged sovereign had been unable to detect.

I saw the gathering frown on the King of Finland's dark face; I saw Sir Peter Grebe grow redder and redder, and press his thick lips together to control the angry "Bosh!" which need not have been uttered to have been understood. The Baron de Becasse wore a painfully neutral smile, which froze his face into a quaint gargoyle; the Crown-Prince of Monaco looked at his polished finger-nails with a startled yet abstracted resignation. Clearly the young Countess had not a sympathizer in the committee.

Something—perhaps it was the latent chivalry which exists imbedded in us all, perhaps it was pity, perhaps a glimmering dawn of belief in the ux skin—set my thoughts working very quickly.

The Countess d'Alzette finished her notes, then glanced around with a deprecating smile, which died out on her lips when she perceived the silent and stony hostility of her fellow-scientists. A quick expression of alarm came into her lovely eyes. Would they vote against giving her a hearing before the congress? It required a unanimous vote to reject a subject. She turned her eyes on me.

I rose, red as fire, my head humming with a chaos of ideas all disordered and vague, yet whirling along in a single, resistless current. I had come to the congress prepared to deliver a monograph on the great auk; but now the subject went overboard as the birds themselves had, and I found myself pleading with the committee to give the Countess a hearing on the ux.

"Why not?" I exclaimed, warmly. "It is established beyond question that the ux does exist in Tasmania. Wallace saw several uxen, through his telescope, walking about upon the inaccessible heights of the Tasmanian Mountains. Darwin acknowledged that the bird exists; Professor Farrago has published a pamphlet containing an accumulation of all data bearing upon the ux. Why should not Madame la Comtesse be heard by the entire congress?"

I looked at Sir Peter Grebe.

"Have *you* seen this alleged bird skin in the Antwerp Museum?" he asked, perspiring with indignation.

"Yes, I have," said I. "It has been patched up, but how are we to know that the skin did not require patching? I have not found that ostrich skin has been used. It is true that the Tasmanians may have shot the bird to pieces and mended the skin with bits of cassowary hide here and there. But the greater part of the skin, and the beak and claws, are, in my estimation, well worth the serious attention of savants. To pronounce them fraudulent is, in my opinion, rash and premature."

I mopped my brow; I was in for it now. I had thrown in my reputation with the reputation of the Countess.

The displeasure and astonishment of my confrères was unmistakable. In the midst of a strained silence I moved that a vote be taken upon the advisability of a hearing before the congress on the subject of the ux. After a pause the young Countess, pale and determined, seconded my motion. The result of the balloting was a foregone conclusion; the Countess had one vote—she herself refraining from voting—and the subject was entered on the committee-book as acceptable and a date set for the hearing before the International Congress.

The effect of this vote on our little committee was most marked. Constraint took the place of cordiality, polite reserve replaced that guileless and open-hearted courtesy with which our proceedings had begun.

With icy politeness, the Crown-Prince of Monaco asked me to state the subject of the paper I proposed to read before the congress, and I replied quietly that, as I was partly responsible for advocating the discussion of the ux, I proposed to associate myself with the Countess d'Alzette in that matter—if Madame la Comtesse would accept the offer of a brother savant.

"Indeed I will," she said, impulsively, her blue eyes soft with gratitude.

"Very well," observed Sir Peter Grebe, swallowing his indignation and waddling off towards the door; "I shall resign my position on this committee—yes, I will, I tell you!"—as the King of Finland laid a fatherly hand on Sir Peter's sleeve—"I'll not be made responsible for this damn—"

He choked, sputtered, then bowed to the horrified Countess, asking pardon, and declaring that he yielded to nobody in respect for the gentler sex. And he retired with the Baron de Becasse.

But out in the hallway I heard him explode. "Confound it! This is no place for petticoats, Baron! And as for that Yankee ornithologist, he's hung himself with the Countess's corset-string—yes, he has! Don't tell me, Baron! The young idiot was all right until the Countess looked at him, I tell you. Gad! how she crumpled him up with those blue eyes of hers! What the devil do women come into such committees for? Eh? It's an outrage, I tell you! Why, the whole world will jeer at us if we sit and listen to her monograph on that fraudulent bird!"

The young Countess, who was writing near the window, could not have heard this outburst; but I heard it, and so did King Christian and the Crown-Prince of Monaco.

"Lord," thought I, "the Countess and I are in the frying-pan this time. I'll do what I can to keep us both out of the fire."

When the King and the Crown-Prince had made their adieux to the Countess, and she had responded, pale and serious, they came over to where I was standing, looking out on the Seine.

"Though we must differ from you," said the King, kindly, "we wish you all success in this dangerous undertaking."

I thanked him.

"You are a young man to risk a reputation already established," remarked the Crown-Prince; then added: "You are braver than I. Ridicule is a barrier to all knowledge, and, though we know that, we seekers after truth always bring up short at that barrier and dismount, not daring to put our hobbies to the fence."

"One can but come a cropper," said I.

"And risk staking our hobbies? No, no, that would make us ridiculous; and ridicule kills in Europe."

"It's somewhat deadly in America, too," I said, smiling.

"The more honor to you," said the Crown-Prince, gravely.

"Oh, I am not the only one," I answered, lightly. "There is my confrère, Professor Hyssop, who studies apparitions and braves a contempt and ridicule which none of us would dare challenge. We Yankees are learning slowly. Some day we will find the lost key to the future while Europe is sneering at those who are trying to pick the lock."

When King Christian, of Finland, and the Crown-Prince of Monaco had taken their hats and sticks and departed, I glanced across the room at the young Countess, who was now working rapidly on a type-writer, apparently quite oblivious of my presence.

I looked out of the window again, and my gaze wandered over the exposition grounds. Gilt and scarlet and azure the palaces rose in every direction, under a wilderness of fluttering flags. Towers, minarets, turrets, golden spires cut the blue sky; in the west the gaunt Eiffel Tower sprawled across the glittering Esplanade; behind it rose the solid golden dome of the Emperor's tomb, gilded once more by the Almighty's sun, to amuse the living rabble while the dead slumbered in his imperial crypt, himself now but a relic for the amusement of the people whom he had despised. O tempora! O mores! O Napoleon!

Down under my window, in the asphalted court, the King of Finland was entering his beautiful victoria. An adjutant, wearing a cocked hat and brilliant uniform, mounted the box beside the green-and-gold coachman;

the two postilions straightened up in their saddles; the four horses danced. Then, when the Crown-Prince of Monaco had taken a seat beside the King, the carriage rolled away, and far down the quay I watched it until the flutter of the green-and-white plumes in the adjutant's cocked hat was all I could see of vanishing royalty.

I was still musing there by the window, listening to the click and ringing of the type-writer, when I suddenly became aware that the clicking had ceased, and, turning, I saw the young Countess standing beside me.

"Thank you for your chivalrous impulse to help me," she said, frankly, holding out her bare hand.

I bent over it.

"I had not realized how desperate my case was," she said, with a smile. "I supposed that they would at least give me a hearing. How can I thank you for your brave vote in my favor?"

"By giving me your confidence in this matter," said I, gravely. "If we are to win, we must work together and work hard, madame. We are entering a struggle, not only to prove the genuineness of a bird skin and the existence of a bird which neither of us has ever seen, but also a struggle which will either make us famous forever or render it impossible for either of us ever again to face a scientific audience."

"I know it," she said, quietly. "And I understand all the better how gallant a gentleman I have had the fortune to enlist in my cause. Believe me, had I not absolute confidence in my ability to prove the existence of the ux I should not, selfish as I am, have accepted your chivalrous offer to stand or fall with me."

The subtle emotion in her voice touched a responsive chord in me. I looked at her earnestly; she raised her beautiful eyes to mine.

"Will you help me?" she asked.

Would I help her? Faith, I'd pass the balance of my life turning flip-flaps to please her. I did not attempt to undeceive myself; I realized that the lightning had struck me—that I was desperately in love with the young Countess from the tip of her bonnet to the toe of her small, polished shoe. I was curiously cool about it, too, although my heart gave a thump that nigh choked me, and I felt myself going red from temple to chin.

If the Countess d'Alzette noticed it she gave no sign, unless the pink tint under her eyes, deepening, was a subtle signal of understanding to the signal in my eyes.

"Suppose," she said, "that I failed, before the congress, to prove my theory? Suppose my investigations resulted in the exposure of a fraud and my name was held up to ridicule before all Europe? What would become of you, monsieur?"

I was silent.

"You are already celebrated as the discoverer of the mammoth and the great auk," she persisted. "You are young, enthusiastic, renowned, and you have a future before you that anybody in the world might envy."

I said nothing.

"And yet," she said, softly, "you risk all because you will not leave a young woman friendless among her confrères. It is not wise, monsieur; it is gallant and generous and impulsive, but it is not wisdom. Don Quixote rides no more in Europe, my friend."

"He stays at home—seventy million of him—in America," said I.

After a moment she said, "I believe you, monsieur."

"It is true enough," I said, with a laugh. "We are the only people who tilt at windmills these days—we and our cousins, the British, who taught us."

I bowed gayly, and added:

"With your colors to wear, I shall have the honour of breaking a lance against the biggest windmill in the world."

"You mean the Citadel of Science," she said, smiling.

"And its rock-ribbed respectability," I replied.

She looked at me thoughtfully, rolling and unrolling the scroll in her hands. Then she sighed, smiled, and brightened, handing me the scroll.

"Read it carefully," she said; "it is an outline of the policy I suggest that we follow. You will be surprised at some of the statements. Yet every word is the truth. And, monsieur, your reward for the devotion you have offered will be no greater than you deserve, when you find yourself doubly famous for our joint monograph on the ux. Without your vote in the committee I should have been denied a hearing, even though I produced proofs to support my theory. I appreciate that; I do most truly appreciate the courage which prompted you to defend a woman at the risk of your own ruin. Come to me this evening at nine. I hold for you in store a surprise and pleasure which you do not dream of."

"Ah, but I do," I said, slowly, under the spell of her delicate beauty and enthusiasm.

"How can you?" she said, laughing. "You don't even know what awaits you at nine this evening?"

"You," I said, fascinated.

The color swept her face; she dropped me a deep courtesy.

"At nine, then," she said. "No. 8 Rue d'Alouette."

I bowed, took my hat, gloves, and stick and attended her to her carriage below.

Long after the blue-and-black victoria had whirled away down the crowded quay I stood looking after it, mazed in the web of that ancient enchantment whose spell fell over the first man in Eden, and whose sorcery shall not fail till the last man returns his soul.

X

I lunched at my lodgings on the Quai Malthus, and I had but little appetite, having fed upon such an unexpected variety of emotions during the morning.

Now, although I was already heels over head in love, I do not believe that loss of appetite was the result of that alone. I was slowly beginning to realize what my recent attitude might cost me, not only in an utter collapse of my scientific career, and the consequent material ruin which was likely to follow, but in the loss of all my friends at home. The Zoological Society of Bronx Park and the Smithsonian Institution of Washington had sent me as their trusted delegate, leaving it entirely to me to choose the subject on which I was to speak before the International Congress. What, then, would be their attitude when they learned that I had chosen to uphold the dangerous theory of the existence of the ux.

Would they repudiate me and send another delegate to replace me? Would they merely wash their hands of me and let me go to my own destruction?

"I will know soon enough," thought I, "for this morning's proceedings will have been cabled to New York ere now, and read at the breakfast-tables of every old, moss-grown naturalist in America before I see the Countess d'Alzette this evening." And I drew from my pocket the roll of paper which she had given me, and, lighting a cigar, lay back in my chair to read it.

The manuscript had been beautifully type-written, and I had no trouble in following her brief, clear account of the circumstances under which the notorious ux-skin had been obtained. As for the story itself, it was somewhat fishy, but I manfully swallowed my growing nervousness and comforted myself with the belief of Darwin in the existence of the ux, and the subsequent testimony of Wallace, who simply stated what he had seen through his telescope, and then left it to others to identify the enormous birds he described as he had observed them stalking about on the snowy peaks of the Tasmanian Alps.

My own knowledge of the ux was confined to a single circumstance. When, in 1897, I had gone to Tasmania with Professor Farrago, to make a report on the availability of the so-called "Tasmanian devil," as a substitute for the mongoose in the West Indies, I of course heard a great deal of talk among the natives concerning the birds which they affirmed haunted the summits of the mountains.

Our time in Tasmania was too limited to admit of an exploration then. But although we were perfectly aware that the summits of the Tasmanian Alps are inaccessible, we certainly should have attempted to gain them had not the time set for our departure arrived before we had completed the investigation for which we were sent.

One relic, however, I carried away with me. It was a single greenish bronzed feather, found high up in the mountains by a native, and sold to me for a somewhat large sum of money.

Darwin believed the ux to be covered with greenish plumage; Wallace was too far away to observe the color of the great birds; but all the natives of Tasmania unite in affirming that the plumage of the ux is green.

It was not only the color of this feather that made me an eager purchaser, it was the extraordinary length and size. I knew of no living bird large enough to wear such a feather. As for the color, that might have been tampered with before I bought it, and, indeed, testing it later, I found on the fronds traces of sulphate of copper. But the same thing has been found in the feathers of certain birds whose color is metallic green, and it has been proven that such birds pick up and swallow shining bits of copper pyrites.

Why should not the ux do the same thing?

Still, my only reason for believing in the existence of the bird was this single feather. I had easily proved that it belonged to no known species of bird. I also proved it to be similar to the tail-feathers of the ux-skin in Antwerp. But the feathers on the Antwerp specimen were gray, and the longest of them was but three feet in length, while my huge, bronze-green feather measured eleven feet from tip to tip.

One might account for it supposing the Antwerp skin to be that of a young bird, or of a moulting bird, or perhaps of a different sex from the bird whose feather I had secured.

Still, these ideas were not proven. Nothing concerning the birds had been proven. I had but a single fact to lean on, and that was that the feather I possessed could not have belonged to any known species of bird. Nobody but myself knew of the existence of this feather. And now I meant to cable to Bronx Park for it, and to place this evidence at the disposal of the beautiful Countess d'Alzette.

My cigar had gone out, as I sat musing, and I relighted it and resumed my reading of the type-written notes, lazily, even a trifle sceptically, for all the evidence that she had been able to collect to substantiate her theory of the existence of the ux was not half as important as the evidence I was to produce in the shape of that enormous green feather.

I came to the last paragraph, smoking serenely, and leaning back comfortably, one leg crossed over the other. Then, suddenly, my attention became riveted on the words under my eyes. Could I have read them aright? Could I believe what I read in ever-growing astonishment which culminated in an excitement that stirred the very hair on my head?

> "The ux exists. There is no longer room for doubt. Ocular proof I can now offer in the shape of *five living eggs* of this gigantic bird. All measures have been taken to hatch these eggs; they are now in the vast incubator. It is my plan to have them hatch, one by one, under the very eyes of the International Congress. It will be the greatest triumph that science has witnessed since the discovery of the New World.
>
> [Signed] "SUSANNE D'ALZETTE."

"Either," I cried out, in uncontrollable excitement—"either that girl is mad or she is the cleverest woman on earth."

After a moment I added:

"In either event I am going to marry her."

XI

That evening, a few minutes before nine o'clock, I descended from a cab in front of No. 8 Rue d'Alouette, and was ushered into a pretty reception-room by an irreproachable servant, who disappeared directly with my card.

In a few moments the young Countess came in, exquisite in her silvery dinner-gown, eyes bright, white arms extended in a charming, impulsive welcome. The touch of her silky fingers thrilled me; I was dumb under the enchantment of her beauty; and I think she understood my silence, for her blue eyes became troubled and the happy parting of her lips changed to a pensive curve.

Presently I began to tell her about my bronzed-green feather; at my first word she looked up brightly, almost gratefully, I fancied; and in another moment we were deep in eager discussion of the subject which had first drawn us together.

What evidence I possessed to sustain our theory concerning the existence of the ux I hastened to reveal; then, heart beating excitedly, I asked her about the eggs and where they were at present, and whether she believed it possible to bring them to Paris—all these questions in the same breath—which brought a happy light into her eyes and a delicious ripple of laughter to her lips.

"Why, of course it is possible to bring the eggs here," she cried. "Am I sure? Parbleu! The eggs are already here, monsieur!"

"Here!" I exclaimed. "In Paris?"

"In Paris? Mais oui; and in my own house—*this very house,* monsieur. Come, you shall behold them with your own eyes!"

Her eyes were brilliant with excitement; impulsively she stretched out her rosy hand. I took it; and she led me quickly back through the drawing-room, through the dining-room, across the butler's pantry, and into a long, dark hallway. We were almost running now—I keeping tight hold of her soft little hand, she, raising her gown a trifle, hurrying down the hallway, silken petticoats rustling like a silk banner in the wind. A turn to the right brought us to the cellar-stairs; down we hastened, and then across the cemented floor towards a long, glass-fronted shelf, pierced with steam-pipes.

"A match," she whispered, breathlessly.

I struck a wax match and touched it to the gas-burner overhead.

Never, never can I forget what that flood of gas-light revealed. In a row stood five large, glass-mounted incubators; behind the glass doors lay, in dormant majesty, five enormous eggs. The eggs were pale-green—lighter, somewhat, than robins' eggs, but not as pale as herons' eggs. Each egg appeared to be larger than a large hogshead, and was partly embedded in bales of cotton-wool.

Five little silver thermometers inside the glass doors indicated a temperature of 95° Fahrenheit. I noticed that there was an automatic arrangement connected with the pipes which regulated the temperature.

I was too deeply moved for words. Speech seemed superfluous as we stood there, hand in hand, contemplating those gigantic, pale-green eggs.

There is something in a silent egg which moves one's deeper emotions—something solemn in its embryotic inertia, something awesome in its featureless immobility.

I know of nothing on earth which is so totally lacking in expression as an egg. The great desert Sphinx, brooding through its veil of sand, has not that tremendous and meaningless dignity which wraps the colorless oval effort of a single domestic hen.

I held the hand of the young Countess very tightly. Her fingers closed slightly.

Then and there, in the solemn presence of those emotionless eggs, I placed my arm around her supple waist and kissed her.

She said nothing. Presently she stooped to observe the thermometer. Naturally, it registered 95° Fahrenheit.

"Suzanne," I said, softly.

"Oh, we must go up-stairs," she whispered, breathlessly; and, picking up her silken skirts, she fled up the cellar-stairs.

I turned out the gas, with that instinct of economy which early wastefulness has implanted in me, and followed the Countess Suzanne through the suite of rooms and into the small reception-hall where she had first received me.

She was sitting on a low divan, head bent, slowly turning a sapphire ring on her finger, round and round.

I looked at her romantically, and then—

"Please don't," she said.

The correct reply to this is:

"Why not?"—very tenderly spoken.

"Because," she replied, which was also the correct and regular answer.

"Suzanne," I said, slowly and passionately.

She turned the sapphire ring on her finger. Presently she tired of this, so I lifted her passive hand very gently and continued turning the sapphire ring on her finger, slowly, to harmonize with the cadence of our unspoken thoughts.

Towards midnight I went home, walking with great care through a new street in Paris, paved exclusively with rose-colored blocks of air.

XII

At nine o'clock in the evening, July 31, 1900, the International Congress was to assemble in the great lecture-hall of the Belgian Scientific Pavilion, which adjourned the Tasmanian Pavilion, to hear the Countess Suzanne d'Alzette read her paper on the ux.

That morning the Countess and I, with five furniture vans, had transported the five great incubators to the platform of the lecture-hall, and had engaged an army of plumbers and gas-fitters to make the steam-heating connections necessary to maintain in the incubators a temperature of 100° Fahrenheit.

A heavy green curtain hid the stage from the body of the lecture-hall. Behind this curtain the five enormous eggs reposed, each in its incubator.

The Countess Suzanne was excited and calm by turns, her cheeks were pink, her lips scarlet, her eyes bright as blue planets at midnight.

Without faltering she rehearsed her discourse before me, reading from her type-written manuscript in a clear voice, in which I could scarcely discern a tremor. Then we went through the dumb show of exhibiting the uxen eggs to a frantically applauding audience; she responded to countless suppositious encores, I leading her out repeatedly before the green curtain to face the great, damp, darkened auditorium.

Then, in response to repeated imaginary recalls, she rehearsed the extemporaneous speech, thanking the distinguished audience for their patience in listening to an unknown confrère, and confessing her obligations to me (here I appeared and bowed in self-abasement) for my faith in her and my aid in securing for her a public hearing before the most highly educated audience in the world.

After that we retired behind the curtain to sit on an empty box and eat sandwiches and watch the last lingering plumbers pasting up the steam connections with a pot of molten lead.

The plumbers were Americans, brought to Paris to make repairs on the American buildings during the exposition, and we conversed with them affably as they pottered about, plumber-like, poking under the flooring with lighted candles, rubbing their thumbs up and down musty old pipes, and prying up planks in dark corners.

They informed us that they were union men and that they hoped we were too. And I replied that union was certainly my ultimate purpose, at which the young Countess smiled dreamily at vacancy.

We did not dare leave the incubators. The plumbers lingered on, hour after hour, while we sat and watched the little silver thermometers, and waited.

It was time for the Countess Suzanne to dress, and still the plumbers had not finished; so I sent a messenger for her maid, to bring her trunk to the lecture-hall, and I despatched another messenger to my lodgings for my evening clothes and fresh linen.

There were several dressing-rooms off the stage. Here, about six o'clock, the Countess retired with her maid, to dress, leaving me to watch the plumbers and the thermometers.

When the Countess Suzanne returned, radiant and lovely in an evening gown of black lace, I gave her the roses I had brought for her and hurried off to dress in my turn, leaving her to watch the thermometers.

I was not absent more than half an hour, but when I returned I found the Countess anxiously conversing with the plumbers and pointing despairingly at the thermometers, which now registered only 95°.

"You must keep up the temperature!" I said. "Those eggs are due to hatch within a few hours. What's the trouble with the heat?"

The plumber did not know, but thought the connections were defective.

"But that's why we called you in!" exclaimed the Countess. "Can't you fix things securely?"

"Oh, we'll fix things, lady," replied the plumber, condescendingly, and he ambled away to rub his thumb up and down a pipe.

As we alone were unable to move and handle the enormous eggs, the Countess, whose sweet character was a stranger to vindictiveness or petty resentment, had written to the members of the ornithological committee, revealing the marvellous fortune which had crowned her efforts in the search for evidence to sustain her theory concerning the ux, and inviting these gentlemen to aid her in displaying the great eggs to the assembled congress.

This she had done the night previous. Every one of the gentlemen had come post-haste to her "hotel," to view the eggs with their own sceptical and astonished eyes; and the fair young Countess and I tasted our first triumph in her cellar, whither we conducted Sir Peter Grebe, the Crown-Prince of Monaco, Baron de Becasse, and his Majesty King Christian of Finland.

Scepticism and incredulity gave place to excitement and unbounded enthusiasm. The old King embraced the Countess; Baron de Becasse attempted to kiss me; Sir Peter Grebe made a handsome apology for his folly and vowed that he would do open penance for his sins. The poor Crown-Prince, who was of a nervous temperament, sat on the cellar-stairs and wept like a child.

His grief at his own pig-headedness touched us all profoundly.

So it happened that these gentlemen were coming to-night to give their aid to us in moving the priceless eggs, and lend their countenance and enthusiastic support to the young Countess in her maiden effort.

Sir Peter Grebe arrived first, all covered with orders and decorations, and greeted us affectionately, calling the Countess the "sweetest lass in France," and me his undutiful Yankee cousin who had landed feet foremost at the expense of the British Empire.

The King of Finland, the Crown-Prince, and Baron de Becasse arrived together, a composite mass of medals, sashes, and academy palms. To see them moving boxes about, straightening chairs, and pulling out rugs reminded me of those golden-embroidered gentlemen who run out into the arena and roll up carpets after the acrobats have finished their turn in the Nouveau Cirque.

I was aiding the King of Finland to move a heavy keg of nails, when the Countess called out to me in alarm, saying that the thermometers had dropped to 80° Fahrenheit.

I spoke sharply to the plumbers, who were standing in a circle behind the dressing-rooms; but they answered sullenly that they could do no more work that day.

Indignant and alarmed, I ordered them to come out to the stage, and, after some hesitation, they filed out, a sulky, silent lot of workmen, with their tools already gathered up and tied in their kits. At once I noticed that a new man had appeared among them—a red-faced, stocky man wearing a frock-coat and a shiny silk hat.

"Who is the master-workman here?" I asked.

"I am," said a man in blue overalls.

"Well," said I, "why don't you fix those steam-fittings?"

There was a silence. The man in the silk hat smirked.

"Well?" said I.

"Come, come, that's all right," said the man in the silk hat. "These men know their business without you tellin' them."

"Who are you?" I demanded, sharply.

"Oh, I'm just a walkin' delegate," he replied, with a sneer. "There's a strike in New York and I come over here to tie this here exposition up. See?"

"You mean to say you won't let these men finish their work?" I asked, thunderstruck.

"That's about it, young man," he said, coolly.

Furious, I glanced at my watch, then at the thermometers, which now registered only 75°. Already I could hear the first-comers of the audience arriving in the body of the hall. Already a stage-hand was turning up the footlights and dragging chairs and tables hither and thither.

"What will you take to stay and attend to those steam-pipes?" I demanded, desperately.

"It can't be done nohow," observed the man in the silk hat. "That New York strike is good for a month yet." Then, turning to the workmen, he nodded and, to my horror, the whole gang filed out after him, turning deaf ears to my entreaties and threats.

There was a deathly silence, then Sir Peter exploded into a vivid shower of words. The Countess, pale as a ghost, gave me a heart-breaking look. The Crown-Prince wept.

"Great Heaven!" I cried; "the thermometers have fallen to 70°!"

The King of Finland sat down on a chair and pressed his hands over his eyes. Baron de Becasse ran round and round, uttering subdued and plaintive screams; Sir Peter swore steadily.

"Gentlemen," I cried, desperately, "we must save those eggs! They are on the very eve of hatching! Who will volunteer?"

"To do what?" moaned the Crown-Prince.

"I'll show you," I exclaimed, running to the incubators and beckoning to the Baron to aid me.

In a moment we had rolled out the great egg, made a nest on the stage floor with the bales of cotton-wool, and placed the egg in it. One after another we rolled out the remaining eggs, building for each its nest of cotton; and at last the five enormous eggs lay there in a row behind the green curtain.

"Now," said I, excitedly, to the King, "you must get up on that egg and try to keep it warm."

The King began to protest, but I would take no denial, and presently his Majesty was perched up on the great egg, gazing foolishly about at the others, who were now all climbing up on their allotted eggs.

"Great Heaven!" muttered the King, as Sir Peter settled down comfortably on his egg, "I am willing to give life and fortune for the sake of science, but I can't bear to hatch out eggs like a bird!"

The Crown-Prince was now sitting patiently beside the Baron de Becasse.

"I feel in my bones," he murmured, "that I'm about to hatch something. Can't you hear a tapping on the shell of your egg, Baron?"

"Parbleu!" replied the Baron. "The shell is moving under me."

It certainly was; for, the next moment, the Baron fell into his egg with a crash and a muffled shriek, and floundered out, dripping, yellow as a canary.

"N'importe!" he cried, excitedly. "Allons! Save the eggs! Hurrah! Vive la science!" And he scrambled up on the fourth egg and sat there, arms folded, sublime courage transfiguring him from head to foot.

We all gave him a cheer, which was hushed as the stage-manager ran in, warning us that the audience was already assembled and in place.

"You're not going to raise the curtain while we're sitting, are you?" demanded the King of Finland, anxiously.

"No, no," I said; "sit tight, your Majesty. Courage, gentlemen! Our vindication is at hand!"

The Countess glanced at me with startled eyes; I took her hand, saluted it respectfully, and then quietly led her before the curtain, facing an ocean of upturned faces across the flaring footlights.

She stood a moment to acknowledge the somewhat ragged applause, a calm smile on her lips. All her courage had returned; I saw that at once.

Very quietly she touched her lips to the *eau-sucrée,* laid her manuscript on the table, raised her beautiful head, and began:

"That the ux is a living bird I am here before you to prove—"

A sharp report behind the curtain drowned her voice. She paled; the audience rose amid cries of excitement.

"What was it?" she asked, faintly.

"Sir Peter has hatched out his egg," I whispered. "Hark! There goes another egg!" And I ran behind the curtain.

Such a scene as I beheld was never dreamed of on land or sea. Two enormous young uxen, all over gigantic pin-feathers, were wandering stupidly about. Mounted on one was Sir Peter Grebe, eyes starting from his apoplectic visage; on the other, clinging to the bird's neck, hung the Baron de Becasse.

Before I could move, the two remaining eggs burst, and a pair of huge, scrawny fledgelings rose among the débris, bearing off on their backs the King and Crown-Prince.

"Help!" said the King of Finland, faintly. "I'm falling off!"

I sprang to his aid, but tripped on the curtain-spring. The next instant the green curtain shot up, and there, revealed to that vast and distinguished audience, roamed four enormous chicks, bearing on their backs the most respected and exclusive aristocracy of Europe.

The Countess Suzanne turned with a little shriek of horror, then sat down in her chair, laid her lovely head on the table, and very quietly fainted away, unconscious of the frantic cheers which went roaring to the roof.

* * *

This, then, is the *true* history of the famous exposition scandal. And, as I have said, had it not been for the presence in that audience of two American reporters nobody would have known what all the world now knows—nobody would have read of the marvellous feats of bareback riding indulged in by the King of Finland—nobody would have read how Sir Peter Grebe steered his mount safely past the footlights only to come to grief over the prompter's box.

But this *is* scandal. And, as for the charming Countess Suzanne d'Alzette, the public has heard all that it is entitled to hear, and much that it is not entitled to hear.

However, on second thoughts, perhaps the public is entitled to hear a little more. I will therefore say this much—the shock of astonishment which stunned me when the curtain flew up, revealing the King-bestridden uxen, was nothing to the awful blow which smote me when the Count d'Alzette leaped from the orchestra, over the footlights, and bore away with him the fainting form of his wife, the lovely Countess d'Alzette.

I sometimes wonder—but, as I have repeatedly observed, this dull and pedantic narrative of fact is no vehicle for sentimental soliloquy. It is, then, merely sufficient to say that I took the earliest steamer for kinder shores, spurred on to haste by a venomous cablegram from the Smithsonian, repudiating me, and by another from the Bronx Park, ordering me to spend the winter in some inexpensive, poisonous, and unobtrusive spot, and make a collection of isopods. The island of Java appeared to me to be as poisonously unobtrusive and inexpensive a region as I had ever heard of; a steamer sailed from Antwerp for Batavia in twenty-four hours. Therefore, as I say, I took the night-train for Brussels, and the steamer from Antwerp the following evening.

Of my uneventful voyage, of the happy and successful quest, there is little to relate. The Javanese are frolicsome and hospitable. There was a girl there with features that were as delicate as though chiselled out of palest amber; and I remember she wore a most wonderful jewelled, helmet-like head-dress, and jingling bangles on her ankles, and when she danced she made most graceful and poetic gestures with her supple wrists—but that has nothing to do with isopods, absolutely nothing.

Letters from home came occasionally. Professor Farrago had returned to the Bronx and had been re-elected to the high office he had so nobly held when I first became associated with him.

Through his kindness and by his advice I remained for several years in the Far East, until a letter from him arrived recalling me and also announcing his own hurried and sudden departure for Florida. He also mentioned my promotion to the office of subcurator of department; so I started on my homeward voyage very much pleased with the world, and arrived in New

York on April 1, 1904, ready for a rest to which I believed myself entitled. And the first thing that they handed me was a letter from Professor Farrago, summoning me South.

XIII

The letter that started me—I was going to say startled me, but only imaginative people are startled—the letter, then, that started me from Bronx Park to the South I print without the permission of my superior, Professor Farrago. I have not obtained his permission, for the somewhat exciting reason that nobody knows where he is. Publicity being now recognized as the annihilator of mysteries, a benevolent purpose alone inspires me to publish a letter so strange, so pathetically remarkable, in view of what has recently occurred.

As I say, I had only just returned from Java with a valuable collection of undescribed isopods—an order of edriophthalmous crustaceans with seven free thoracic somites furnished with fourteen legs—and I beg my reader's pardon, but my reader will see the necessity for the author's absolute accuracy in insisting on detail, because the story that follows is a dangerous story for a scientist to tell, in view of the vast amount of nonsense and fiction in circulation masquerading as stories of scientific adventure.

I was, therefore, anticipating a delightful summer's work with pen and microscope, when on April 1st I received the following extraordinary letter from Professor Farrago:

> "IN CAMP, LITTLE SPRITE LAKE,
> "EVERGLADES, FLORIDA, *March* 15, 1902.
>
> "MY DEAR MR. GILLAND,—On receipt of this communication you will immediately secure for me the following articles:
>
> "One complete outfit of woman's clothing.
>
> "One camera.
>
> "One light steel cage, large enough for you to stand in.
>
> "One stenographer (male sex).
>
> "One five-pound steel tank, with siphon and hose attachment.
>
> "One rifle and ammunition.
>
> "Three ounces rosium oxide.
>
> "One ounce chlorate strontium.
>
> "You will then, within twenty-four hours, set out with the stenographer and the supplies mentioned and join me in camp on Little Sprite Lake. This order is formal and admits of no delay. You will appreciate the necessity of absolute and unquestioning obedience when I tell you that I am practically on the brink of the most astonishing

discovery recorded in natural history since Monsieur Zani discovered the purple-spotted zoombok in Nyanza; and that I depend upon you and your zeal and fidelity for success.

"I dare not, lest my letter fall into unscrupulous hands, convey to you more than a hint of what lies before us in these uncharted solitudes of the Everglades.

"You must read between the lines when I say that because one can see through a sheet of glass, the glass is none the less solid and palpable. One can see *through* it—if that is also seeing it; but one can nevertheless hold it and feel it and receive from it sensations of cold or heat according to its temperature.

"Certain jellyfish are absolutely transparent when in the water, and one can only know of their presence by accidental contact, not by sight.

"Have you ever thought that possibly there might exist larger and more highly organized creatures transparent to eyesight, yet palpable to touch?

"Little Sprite Lake is the jumping-off place; beyond lie the Everglades, the outskirts of which are haunted by the Seminoles, the interior of which *have never been visited by man, as far as we know.*

"As you are aware, no general survey of Florida has yet been made; there exist no maps of the Everglades south of Okeechobee; even Little Sprite Lake is but a vague blot on our maps. We know, of course, that south of the eleven thousand square miles of fresh water which is called Lake Okeechobee the Everglades form a vast, delta-like projection of thousands and thousands of square miles. Darkest Africa is no longer a mystery; but the Everglades to-day remain the sombre secret of our continent. And, to-day, this unknown expanse of swamps, barrens, forests, and lagoons is greater than in the days of De Soto, because the entire region has been slowly rising.

"All this, my dear sir, you already know, and I ask your indulgence for recalling the facts to your memory. I do it for this reason—the search for *what I am seeking* may lead us to utter destruction; and therefore my formal orders to you should be modified to this extent:—do you volunteer? If you volunteer, my orders remain; if not, turn this letter over to Mr. Kingsley, who will find for me the companion I require.

"In the event of your coming, you must break your journey at False Cape and ask for an old man named

> Slunk. He will give you a packet; you will give him a dollar, and drive on to Cape Canaveral, and you will do what is to be done there. From there to Fort Kissimmee, to Okeechobee, traversing the lake to the Rita River, where I have marked the trail to Little Sprite.
>
> "At Little Sprite I shall await you; beyond that point a merciful Providence alone can know what awaits us.
>
> "Yours fraternally,
>
> "FARRAGO.
>
> "P.S.—I think that you had better make your will, and suggest the same idea to the stenographer who is to accompany you. F."

And that was the letter I received while seated comfortably on the floor of my work-room, surrounded by innocent isopods, all patiently awaiting scientific investigation.

And this is what I did: Within twenty-four hours I had assembled the supplies required—the cage, the woman's clothing, tank, arms and ammunition, and the chemicals; I had secured accommodations, for that evening, on the Florida, Volusia, and Fort Lauderdale Railway as far as Citron City; and I had been interviewing stenographers all day long, the result of an innocently worded advertisement in the daily newspapers.

It was now very close to the time when I must summon a cab and drive to the ferry; and yet I was still shy one stenographer.

I had seen scores; they simply would not listen to the proposition. "Why does a gentleman in the backwoods of Florida want a stenographer?" they demanded; and as I had not the faintest idea, I could only say so. I think the majority interviewed concluded I had escaped from a State institution.

As the time for departure approached I became desperate, urging and beseeching applicants to accompany me; but neither sympathy for my instant need nor desire for salary moved them.

I waited until the last moment, hoping against hope. Then, with a groan of despair, I seized luggage and raincoat, made for the door and flung it open, only to find myself face to face with an attractive young girl, apparently on the point of pressing the electric button.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I have a train to catch."

She was noticeably attractive in her storm-coat and pretty hat, and I really was sorry—so sorry that I added:

"I have about twenty-seven seconds to place at your service before I go."

"Twenty will be sufficient," she replied, pleasantly. "I saw your advertisement for a stenographer—"

"We require a man," I interposed, hastily.

"Have you engaged him?"

"N-no."

We looked at each other.

"You wouldn't accept, anyway," I began.

"How do you know?"

"You wouldn't leave town, would you?"

"Yes, if you required it."

"What? Go to Florida?"

"Y-yes—if I must."

"But think of the alligators! Think of the snakes—big, bitey snakes!"

"Gracious!" she exclaimed, eyes growing bigger.

"Indians, too!—unreconciled, sulky Seminoles! Fevers! Mud-puddles! Spiders! And only fifty dollars a week—"

"I—I'll go," she stammered.

"Go?" I repeated, grimly; "then you've exactly two and three-quarter seconds left for preparations."

Instinctively she raised her little gloved hand and patted her hair. "I'm ready," she said, unsteadily.

"One extra second to make your will," I added, stunned by her self-possession.

"I—I have nothing to leave—nobody to leave it to," she said, smiling; "I am ready."

I took that extra second myself for a lightning course in reflection upon effects and consequences.

"It's silly, it's probably murder," I said, "but you're engaged! Now we must run for it!"

And that is how I came to engage the services of Miss Helen Barrison as stenographer.

XIV

At noon on the second day I disembarked from the train at Citron City with all paraphernalia—cage, chemicals, arsenal, and stenographer; an accumulation of very dusty impedimenta—all but the stenographer. By three o'clock our hotel livery-rig was speeding along the beach at False Cape towards the tall light-house looming above the dunes.

The abode of a gentleman named Slunk was my goal. I sat brooding in the rickety carriage, still dazed by the rapidity of my flight from New York; the stenographer sat beside me, blue eyes bright with excitement, fair hair blowing in the sea-wind.

Our railway companionship had been of the slightest, also absolutely formal; for I was too absorbed in conjecturing the meaning of this journey to be more than absent-mindedly civil; and she, I fancy, had had time for repentance and perhaps for a little fright, though I could discover traces of neither.

I remember she left the train at some city or other where we were held for an hour; and out of the car-window I saw her returning with a brand-new gripsack.

She must have bought clothes, for she continued to remain cool and fresh in her summer shirt-waists and short outing skirt; and she looked immaculate now, sitting there beside me, the trace of a smile curving her red mouth.

"I'm looking for a personage named Slunk," I observed.

After a moment's silent consideration of the Atlantic Ocean she said, "When do my duties begin, Mr. Gilland?"

"The Lord alone knows," I replied, grimly. "Are you repenting of your bargain?"

"I am quite happy," she said, serenely.

Remorse smote me that I had consented to engage this frail, pink-and-ivory biped for an enterprise which lay outside the suburbs of Manhattan. I glanced guiltily at my victim; she sat there, the incarnation of New York piquancy—a translated denizen of the metropolis—a slender spirit of the back offices of sky-scrapers. Why had I lured her hither?—here where the heavy, lavender-tinted breakers thundered on a lost coast; here where above the dune-jungles vultures soared, and snowy-headed eagles, hulking along the sands, tore dead fish and yelped at us as we passed.

Strange waters, strange skies—a strange, lost land aquiver under an exotic sun; and there she sat with her wise eyes of a child, unconcerned, watching the world in perfect confidence.

"May I pay a little compliment to your pluck?" I asked, amused.

"Certainly," she said, smiling as the maid of Manhattan alone knows how to smile—shyly, inquiringly—with a lingering hint of laughter in the curled lips' corners. Then her sensitive features fell a trifle. "Not pluck," she said, "but necessity. I had no chance to choose, no time to wait. My last dollar, Mr. Gilland, is in my purse!"

With a gay little gesture she drew it from her shirt-front, then, smiling, sat turning it over and over in her lap.

The sun fell on her hands, gilding the smooth skin with the first tint of sunburn. Under the corners of her eyes above the rounded cheeks a pink stain lay like the first ripening flush on a wild strawberry. That, too, was the mark left by the caress of wind and sun. I had had no idea she was so pretty.

"I think we'll enjoy this adventure," I said; "don't you?"

"I try to make the best of things," she said, gazing off into the horizon haze. "Look," she added; "is that a man?"

A spot far away on the beach caught my eye. At first I thought it was a pelican—and small wonder, too, for the dumpy, waddling, goose-necked individual who loomed up resembled a heavy bottomed bird more than a human being.

"Do you suppose that could be Mr. Slunk?" asked the stenographer, as our vehicle drew nearer.

He looked as though his name ought to be Slunk; he was digging coquina clams, and he dug with a pecking motion like a water-turkey mastering a mullet too big for it.

His name was Slunk; he admitted it when I accused him. Our negro driver drew rein, and I descended to the sand and gazed on Mr. Slunk.

He was, as I have said, not impressive, even with the tremendous background of sky and ocean.

"I've come something over a thousand miles to see you," I said, reluctant to admit that I had come as far to see such a specimen of human architecture.

A weather-beaten grin stretched the skin that covered his face, and he shoved a hairy paw into the pockets of his overalls, digging deeply into profound depths. First he brought to light a twist of South Carolina tobacco, which he leisurely inserted in his mouth—not, apparently, for pleasure, but merely to get rid of it.

The second object excavated from the overalls was a small packet addressed to me. This he handed to me; I gravely handed him a silver dollar; he went back to his clam-digging, and I entered the carriage and drove on. All had been carried out according to the letter of my instructions so far, and my spirits brightened.

"If you don't mind I'll read my instructions," I said, in high good-humor.

"Pray do not hesitate," she said, smiling in sympathy.

So I opened the little packet and read:

> "Drive to Cape Canaveral along the beach. You will find a gang of men at work on a government breakwater. The superintendent is Mr. Rowan. Show him this letter.
>
> "FARRAGO."

Rather disappointed—for I had been expecting to find in the packet some key to the interesting mystery which had sent Professor Farrago into the Everglades—I thrust the missive into my pocket and resumed a study of the immediate landscape. It had not changed as we progressed: ocean, sand, low dunes crowned with impenetrable tangles of wild bay, sparkleberry, and live-oak, with here and there a weather-twisted palmetto sprawling, and here and there the battered blades of cactus and Spanish-bayonet thrust menacingly forward; and over all the vultures, sailing, sailing—some mere circling motes lost in the blue above, some sheering the earth so close that their swiftly sweeping shadows slanted continually across our road.

"I detest a buzzard," I said, aloud.

"I thought they were crows," she confessed.

"Carrion-crows—yes.

"'The carrion-crows
Sing, Caw! caw!'

—only they don't," I added, my song putting me in good-humor once more. And I glanced askance at the pretty stenographer.

"It is a pleasure to be employed by agreeable people," she said, innocently.

"Oh, I can be much more agreeable than that," I said.

"Is Professor Farrago—amusing?" she asked.

"Well—oh, certainly—but not in—in the way I am."

Suddenly it flashed upon me that my superior was a confirmed hater of unmarried women. I had clean forgotten it; and now the full import of what I had done scared me silent.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Miss Barrison.

"No—not yet," I said, ominously.

How on earth could I have overlooked that well-known fact. The hurry and anxiety, the stress of instant preparation and departure, had clean driven it from my absent-minded head.

Jogging on over the sand, I sat silent, cudgelling my brains for a solution of the disastrous predicament I had gotten into. I pictured the astonished rage of my superior—my probable dismissal from employment—perhaps the general overturning and smash-up of the entire expedition.

A distant, dark object on the beach concentrated my distracted thoughts; it must be the breakwater at Cape Canaveral. And it was the breakwater, swarming with negro workmen, who were swinging great blocks of coquina into cemented beds, singing and whistling at their labor.

I forgot my predicament when I saw a thin white man in sun-helmet and khaki directing the work from the beach; and as our horses plodded up, I stepped out and hailed him by name.

"Yes, my name is Rowan," he said, instantly, turning to meet me. His sharp, clear eyes included the vehicle and the stenographer, and he lifted his helmet, then looked squarely at me.

"My name is Gilland," I said, dropping my voice and stepping nearer. "I have just come from Bronx Park, New York."

He bowed, waiting for something more from me; so I presented my credentials.

His former manner changed at once. "Come over here and let us talk a bit," he said, cordially—then hesitated, glancing at Miss Barrison—"if your wife would excuse us—"

The pretty stenographer colored, and I dryly set Mr. Rowan right—which appeared to disturb him more than his mistake.

"Pardon me, Mr. Gilland, but you do not propose to take this young girl into the Everglades, do you?"

"That's what I had proposed to do," I said, brusquely.

Perfectly aware that I resented his inquiry, he cast a perplexed and troubled glance at her, then slowly led the way to a great block of sun-warmed coquina, where he sat down, motioning me to do the same.

"I see," he said, "that you don't know just where you are going or just what you are expected to do."

"No, I don't," I said.

"Well, I'll tell you, then. You are going into the devil's own country to look for something that I fled five hundred miles to avoid."

"Is that so?" I said, uneasily.

"That is so, Mr. Gilland."

"Oh! And what is this object that I am to look for and from which you fled five hundred miles?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know what you ran away from?"

"No, sir. Perhaps if I had known I should have run a thousand miles."

We eyed one another.

"You think, then, that I'd better send Miss Barrison back to New York?" I asked.

"I certainly do. It may be murder to take her."

"Then I'll do it!" I said, nervously. "Back she goes from the first railroad station."

In a flash the thought came to me that here was a way to avoid the wrath of Professor Farrago—and a good excuse, too. He might forgive my not bringing a man as stenographer in view of my limited time; he never would forgive my presenting him with a woman.

"She must go back," I repeated; and it rather surprised me to find myself already anticipating loneliness—something that never in all my travels had I experienced before.

"By the first train," I added, firmly, disliking Mr. Rowan without any reason except that he had suddenly deprived me of my stenographer.

"What I have to tell you," he began, lighting a cigarette, the mate to which I declined, "is this: Three years ago, before I entered this contracting business, I was in the government employ as officer in the Coast Survey. Our duties took us into Florida waters; we were months at a time working on shore."

He pulled thoughtfully at his cigarette and blew a light cloud into the air.

"I had leave for a month once; and like an ass I prepared to spend it in a hunting-trip among the Everglades."

He crossed his lean legs and gazed meditatively at his cigarette.

"I believe," he went on, "that we penetrated the Everglades farther than any white man who ever lived to return. There's nothing very dismal about the Everglades—the greater part, I mean. You get high and low hummock, marshes, creeks, lakes, and all that. If you get lost, you're a goner. If you acquire fever, you're as well off as the seraphim—and not a whit better. There are the usual animals there—bears (little black fellows), lynxes, deer, panthers, alligators, and a few stray crocodiles. As for snakes, of course they're there, moccasins a-plenty, some rattlers, but, after all, not as many snakes as one finds in Alabama, or even northern Florida and Georgia.

"The Seminoles won't help you—won't even talk to you. They're a sullen pack—but not murderous, as far as I know. Beyond their inner limits lie the unknown regions."

He bit the wet end from his cigarette.

"I went there," he said; "I came out as soon as I could."

"Why?"

"Well—for one thing, my companion died of fright."

"Fright? What at?"

"Well, there's something in there."

"What?"

He fixed a penetrating gaze on me. "I don't know, Mr. Gilland."

"Did you see anything to frighten you?" I insisted.

"No, but I felt something." He dropped his cigarette and ground it into the sand viciously. "To cut it short," he said, "I am most unwillingly led to believe that there are—creatures—of some sort in the Everglades—living creatures quite as large as you or I—and that they are perfectly transparent—as transparent as a colorless jellyfish."

Instantly the veiled import of Professor Farrago's letter was made clear to me. He, too, believed that.

"It embarrasses me like the devil to say such a thing," continued Rowan, digging in the sand with his spurred heels. "It seems so—so like a whopping lie—it seems so childish and ridiculous—so cursed cheap! But I fled; and there you are. I might add," he said indifferently, "that I have the ordinary portion of courage allotted to normal men."

"But what do you believe these—these animals to be?" I asked, fascinated.

"I don't know." An obstinate look came into his eyes. "I don't know, and I absolutely refuse to speculate for the benefit of anybody. I wouldn't do it for my friend Professor Farrago; and I'm not going to do it for you," he ended, laughing a rather grim laugh that somehow jarred me into realizing the amazing import of his story. For I did not doubt it, strange as it was—fantastic, incredible though it sounded in the ears of a scientist.

What it was that carried conviction I do not know—perhaps the fact that my superior credited it; perhaps the manner of narration. Told in quiet, commonplace phrases, by an exceedingly practical and unimaginative young man who was plainly embarrassed in the telling, the story rang out like a shout in a cañon, startling because of the absolute lack of emphasis employed in the telling.

"Professor Farrago asked me to speak of this to no one except the man who should come to his assistance. He desired the first chance of clearing this—this rather perplexing matter. No doubt he didn't want exploring parties prowling about him," added Rowan, smiling. "But there's no fear of that, I fancy. I never expect to tell that story again to anybody; I shouldn't have told him, only somehow it's worried me for three years, and though I was deadly afraid of ridicule, I finally made up my mind that science ought to have a hack at it.

"When I was in New York last winter I summoned up courage and wrote Professor Farrago. He came to see me at the Holland House that same evening; I told him as much as I ever shall tell anybody. That is all, Mr. Gilland."

For a long time I sat silent, musing over the strange words. After a while I asked him whether Professor Farrago was supplied with provisions; and he said he was; that a great store of staples and tins of concentrated rations had been carried in as far as Little Sprite Lake; that Professor Farrago was now there alone, having insisted upon dismissing all those he had employed.

"There was no practical use for a guide," added Rowan, "because no cracker, no Indian, and no guide knows the region beyond the Seminole country."

I rose, thanking him and offering my hand. He took it and shook it in manly fashion, saying: "I consider Professor Farrago a very brave man; I may say the same of any man who volunteers to accompany him. Good-bye, Mr. Gilland; I most earnestly wish for your success. Professor Farrago left this letter for you."

And that was all. I climbed back into the rickety carriage, carrying my unopened letter; the negro driver cracked his whip and whistled, and the horses trotted inland over a fine shell road which was to lead us across Verbena Junction to Citron City. Half an hour later we crossed the tracks at Verbena and turned into a broad marl road. This aroused me from my deep and speculative reverie, and after a few moments I asked Miss Barrison's indulgence and read the letter from Professor Farrago which Mr. Rowan had given me:

> "DEAR MR. GILLAND,—You now know all I dared not write, fearing to bring a swarm of explorers about my

> care in case the letter was lost, and found by unscrupulous meddlers. If you still are willing to volunteer, knowing all that I know, join me as soon as possible. If family considerations deter you from taking what perhaps is an insane risk, I shall not expect you to join me. In that event, return to New York immediately and send Kingsley.
>
> "Yours, F."

"What the deuce is the matter with him!" I exclaimed, irritably. "I'll take any chances Kingsley does!"

Miss Barrison looked up in surprise.

"Miss Barrison," I said, plunging into the subject headfirst, "I'm extremely sorry, but I have news that forces me to believe the journey too dangerous for you to attempt, so I think that it would be much better—" The consternation in her pretty face checked me.

"I'm awfully sorry," I muttered, appalled by her silence.

"But—but you engaged me!"

"I know it—I should not have done it. I only—"

"But you did engage me, didn't you?"

"I believe that I did—er—oh, of course—"

"But a verbal contract is binding between honorable people, isn't it, Mr. Gilland?"

"Yes, but—"

"And ours was a verbal contract, and in consideration you paid me my first week's salary, and I bought shirt-waists and a short skirt and three changes of—and tooth-brushes and—"

"I know, I know," I groaned. "But I'll fix all that."

"You can't if you break your contract."

"Why not?"

"Because," she said, flushing up, "I should not accept."

"You don't understand—"

"Really I do. You are going into a dangerous country and you're afraid I'll be frightened."

"It's something like that."

"Tell me what are the dangers?"

"Alligators, big bitey snakes—"

"Oh, you've said all that before!"

"Scorpions—"

"And that too. What else is there? Did the young man in the sun-helmet tell you of something worse?"

"Yes—much worse! Something so dreadfully horrible that—"

"What?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you, Miss Barrison," I said, striving to appear shocked.

"It would not make any difference anyway," she observed, calmly. "I'm not afraid of anything in the world."

"Yes, you are!" I said. "Listen to me; I'd be awfully glad to have you go—I—I really had no idea how I'd miss you—miss such pleasant companionship. But it is not possible—" The recollection of Professor Farrago's aversion suddenly returned. "No, no," I said, "it can't be done. I'm most unhappy over this mistake of mine; please don't look as though you were ready to cry!"

"Don't discharge me, Mr. Gilland," she said.

"I'm a brute to do it, but I must; I was a bigger brute to engage you, but I did. Don't—please don't look at me that way, Miss Barrison! As a matter of fact, I'm tender-hearted and I can't endure it."

"If you only knew what I had been through you wouldn't send me away," she said, in a low voice. "It took my last penny to clothe myself and pay for the last lesson at the college of stenography. I—I lived on almost nothing for weeks; every respectable place was filled; I walked and walked and walked, and nobody wanted me—they all required people with experience—and how can I have experience until I begin, Mr. Gilland? I was perfectly desperate when I went to see you, knowing that you had advertised for a man—" The slightest break in her clear voice scared me.

"I'm not going to cry," she said, striving to smile. "If I must go, I will go. I—I didn't mean to say all this—but—but I've been so—so discouraged;—and you were not very cross with me—"

Smitten with remorse, I picked up her hand and fell to patting it violently, trying to think of something to say. The exercise did not appear to stimulate my wits.

"Then—then I'm to go with you?" she asked.

"I will see," I said, weakly, "but I fear there's trouble ahead for this expedition."

"I fear there is," she agreed, in a cheerful voice. "You have a rifle and a cage in your luggage. Are you going to trap Indians and have me report their language?"

"No, I'm not going to trap Indians," I said, sharply. "They may trap us—but that's a detail. What I want to say to you is this: Professor Farrago detests unmarried women, and I forgot it when I engaged you."

"Oh, is that all?" she asked, laughing.

"Not all, but enough to cost me my position."

"How absurd! Why, there are millions of things we might do!—millions!"

"What's one of them?" I inquired.

"Why, we might pretend to be married!" Her frank and absolutely innocent delight in this suggestion was refreshing, but troubling.

"We would have to be demonstrative to make that story go," I said.

"Why? Well-bred people are not demonstrative in public," she retorted, turning a trifle pink.

"No, but in private—"

"I think there is no necessity for carrying a pleasantry into our private life," she said, in a perfectly amiable voice. "Anyway, if Professor Farrago's feelings are to be spared, no sacrifice on the part of a mere girl could be too great," she added, gayly; "I will wear men's clothes if you wish."

"You may have to anyhow in the jungle," I said; "and as it's not an uncommon thing these days, nobody would ever take you for anything except what you are—a very wilful and plucky and persistent and—"

"And what, Mr. Gilland?"

"And attractive," I muttered.

"Thank you, Mr. Gilland."

"You're welcome," I snapped. The near whistle of a locomotive warned us, and I rose in the carriage, looking out across the sand-hills.

"That is probably our train," observed the pretty stenographer.

"*Our* train!"

"Yes; isn't it?"

"Then you insist—"

"Ah, no, Mr. Gilland; I only trust implicitly in my employer."

"We'll wait till we get to Citron City," I said, weakly; "then it will be time enough to discuss the situation, won't it?"

"Yes, indeed," she said, smiling; but she knew, and I already feared, that the situation no longer admitted of discussion. In a few moments more we emerged, without warning, from the scrub-crested sand-hills into the single white street of Citron City, where China-trees hung heavy with bloom, and magnolias, already set with perfumed candelabra, spread soft, checkered shadows over the marl.

The train lay at the station, oceans of heavy, black smoke lazily flowing from the locomotive; negroes were hoisting empty fruit-crates aboard the baggage-car, through the door of which I caught a glimpse of my steel cage and remaining paraphernalia, all securely crated.

"Telegram hyah foh Mistuh Gilland," remarked the operator, lounging at his window as we descended from our dusty vehicle. He had not addressed himself to anybody in particular, but I said that I was Mr. Gilland, and he produced the envelope. "Toted in from Okeechobee?" he inquired, listlessly.

"Probably; it's signed 'Farrago,' isn't it?"

"It's foh yoh, suh, I reckon," said the operator, handing it out with a yawn. Then he removed his hat and fanned his head, which was perfectly bald.

I opened the yellow envelope. "Get me a good dog with points," was the laconic message; and it irritated me to receive such idiotic instructions at such a time and in such a place. A good dog? Where the mischief could I find a dog in a town consisting of ten houses and a water-tank? I said as much to the bald-headed operator, who smiled wearily and replaced his hat: "Dawg? They's moh houn'-dawgs in Citron City than they's wood-ticks to keep them busy. I reckon a dollah 'll do a heap foh you, suh."

"Could you get me a dog for a dollar?" I asked;—"one with points?"

"Points? I sholy can, suh;—plenty of points. What kind of dawg do yoh requiah, suh?—live dawg? daid dawg? houn'-dawg? raid-dawg? hawg-dawg? coon-dawg?—"

The locomotive emitted a long, lazy, softly modulated and thoroughly Southern toot. I handed the operator a silver dollar, and he presently emerged from his office and slouched off up the street, while I walked with Miss Barrison to the station platform, where I resumed the discussion of her future movements.

"You are very young to take such a risk," I said, gravely. 'Had I not better buy your ticket back to New York? The north-bound train meets this one. I suppose we are waiting for it now—" I stopped, conscious of her impatience.

Her face flushed brightly: "Yes; I think it best. I have embarrassed you too long already—"

"Don't say that!" I muttered. "I—I—shall be deadly bored without you."

"I am not an entertainer, only a stenographer," she said, curtly. "Please get me my ticket, Mr. Gilland."

She gazed at me from the car-platform; the locomotive tooted two drawling toots.

"It is for your sake," I said, avoiding her gaze as the far-off whistle of the north-bound express came floating out of the blue distance.

She did not answer; I fished out my watch, regarding it in silence, listening to the hum of the approaching train, which ought presently to bear her away into the North, where nothing could menace her except the brilliant pitfalls of a Christian civilization. But I stood there, temporizing, unable to utter a word as her train shot by us with a rush, slower, slower, and finally stopped, with a long-drawn sigh from the air-brakes.

At that instant the telegraph-operator appeared, carrying a dog by the scruff of the neck—a sad-eyed, ewe-necked dog, from the four corners of which dangled enormous, cushion-like paws. He yelped when he beheld me. Miss Barrison leaned down from the car-platform and took the animal into her arms, uttering a suppressed exclamation of pity as she lifted him.

"You have your hands full," she said to me; "I'll take him into the car for you."

She mounted the steps; I followed with the valises, striving to get a good view of my acquisition over her shoulder.

"That isn't the kind of dog I wanted!" I repeated again and again, inspecting the animal as it sprawled on the floor of the car at the edge of Miss Barrison's skirt. "That dog is all voice and feet and emotion! What makes it stick up its paws like that? I don't want that dog and I'm not going to identify myself with it! Where's the operator—"

I turned towards the car-window; the operator's bald head was visible on a line with the sill, and I made motions at him. He bowed with courtly grace, as though I were thanking him.

"I'm not!" I cried, shaking my head. "I wanted a dog with points—not the kind of points that stick up all over this dog. Take him away!"

The operator's head appeared to be gliding out of my range of vision; then the windows of the north-bound train slid past, faster and faster. A melancholy grace note from the dog, a jolt, and I turned around, appalled.

"This train is going," I stammered, "and you are on it!"

Miss Barrison sprang up and started towards the door, and I sped after her.

"I can jump," she said, breathlessly, edging out to the platform; "please let me! There is time yet—if you only wouldn't hold me—so tight—"

A few moments later we walked slowly back together through the car and took seats facing one another.

Between us sat the hound-dog, a prey to melancholy unutterable.

XV

It was on Sunday when I awoke to the realization that I had quitted civilization and was afloat on an unfamiliar body of water in an open boat containing—

One light steel cage,
One rifle and ammunition,
One stenographer,
Three ounces rosium oxide,
One hound-dog,
Two valises.

A playful wave slopped over the bow and I lost count; but the pretty stenographer made the inventory, while I resumed the oars, and the dog punctured the primeval silence with staccato yelps.

A few minutes later everything and everybody was accounted for; the sky was blue and the palms waved, and several species of dicky-birds tuned up as I pulled with powerful strokes out into the sunny waters of Little Sprite Lake, now within a few miles of my journey's end.

From ponds hidden in the marshes herons rose in lazily laborious flight, flapping low across the water; high in the cypress yellow-eyed ospreys bent crested heads to watch our progress; sun-baked alligators, lying heavily in the shoreward sedge, slid open, glassy eyes as we passed.

"Even the 'gators make eyes at you," I said, resting on my oars.

We were on terms of badinage.

"Who was it who shed crocodile tears at the prospect of shipping me North?" she inquired.

"Speaking of tears," I observed, "somebody is likely to shed a number when Professor Farrago is picked up."

"Pooh!" she said, and snapped her pretty, sun-tanned fingers; and I resumed the oars in time to avoid shipwreck on a large mud-bar.

She reclined in the stern, serenely occupied with the view, now and then caressing the discouraged dog, now and then patting her hair where the wind had loosened a bright strand.

"If Professor Farrago didn't expect a woman stenographer," she said, abruptly, "why did he instruct you to bring a complete outfit of woman's clothing?"

"I don't know," I said, tartly.

"But you bought them. Are they for a young woman or an old woman?"

"I don't know; I sent a messenger to a department store. I don't know what he bought."

"Didn't you look them over?"

"No. Why? I should have been no wiser. I fancy they're all right, because the bill was eighteen hundred dollars—"

The stenographer sat up abruptly.

"Is that much?" I asked, uneasily. "I've always heard women's clothing was expensive. Wasn't it enough? I told the boy to order the best;—Professor Farrago always requires the very best scientific instruments, and—I listed the clothes as scientific accessories—that being the object of this expedition— *What* are you laughing at?"

When it pleased her to recover her gravity she announced her desire to inspect and repack the clothing; but I refused.

"They're for Professor Farrago," I said. "I don't know what he wants of them. I don't suppose he intends to wear 'em and caper about the jungle, but they're his. I got them because he told me to. I bought a cage, too, to fit myself, but I don't suppose he means to put me in it. Perhaps," I added, "he may invite you into it."

"Let me refold the gowns," she pleaded, persuasively. "What does a clumsy man know about packing such clothing as that? If you don't, they'll be ruined. It's a shame to drag those boxes about through mud and water!"

So we made a landing, and lifted out and unlocked the boxes. All I could see inside were mounds of lace and ribbons, and with a vague idea that Miss Barrison needed no assistance I returned to the boat and sat down to smoke until she was ready.

When she summoned me her face was flushed and her eyes bright.

"Those are certainly the most beautiful things!" she said, softly. "Why, it is like a bride's trousseau—absolutely complete—all except the bridal gown—"

"Isn't there a dress there?" I exclaimed, in alarm.

"No—not a day-dress."

"Night-dresses!" I shrieked. "He doesn't want women's night-dresses! He's a bachelor! Good Heavens! I've done it this time!"

"But—but who is to wear them?" she asked.

"How do I know? I don't know anything; I can only presume that he doesn't intend to open a department store in the Everglades. And if any lady is to wear garments in his vicinity, I assume that those garments are to be anything except diaphanous! . . . Please take your seat in the boat, Miss Barrison. I want to row and think."

I had my fill of exercise and thought when, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Miss Barrison directed my attention to a point of palms jutting out into the water about a mile to the southward.

"That's Farrago!" I exclaimed, catching sight of a United States flag floating majestically from a bamboo-pole. "Give me the megaphone, if you please."

She handed me the instrument; I hailed the shore; and presently a man appeared under the palms at the water's edge.

"Hello!" I roared, trying to inject cheerfulness into the hollow bellow. "How are you, professor?"

The answer came distinctly across the water:

"*Who* is that with you?"

My lips were buried in the megaphone; I strove to speak; I only produced a ghastly, chuckling sound.

"Of course you expect to tell the truth," observed the pretty stenographer, quietly.

I removed my lips from the megaphone and looked around at her. She returned my gaze with a disturbing smile.

"I want to mitigate the blow," I said, hoarsely. "Tell me how."

"I'm sure I don't know," she said, sweetly.

"Well, *I* do!" I fairly barked, and seizing the megaphone again, I set it to my lips and roared, "My fiancée!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Miss Barrison, in consternation, "I thought you were going to tell the truth!"

"Don't do that or you'll upset us," I snapped—"I'm telling the truth; I've engaged myself to you; I did it mentally before I bellowed."

"But—"

"You know as well as I do what engagements mean," I said, picking up the oars and digging them deep in the blue water.

She assented uncertainly.

A few minutes more of vigorous rowing brought us to a muddy landing under a cluster of tall palmettos, where a gasoline launch lay. Professor Farrago came down to the shore as I landed, and I walked ahead to meet him. He was the maddest man I ever saw. But I was his match, for I was desperate.

"What the devil—" he began, under his breath.

"Nonsense!" I said, deliberately. "An engaged woman is practically married already, because marriages are made in heaven."

"Good Lord!" he gasped, "are you mad, Gilland? I sent for a stenographer—"

"Miss Barrison is a stenographer," I said, calmly; and before he could recover I had presented him, and left them face to face, washing my hands of the whole affair.

Unloading the boat and carrying the luggage up under the palms, I heard her saying:

"No, I am not in the least afraid of snakes, and I am quite ready to begin my duties."

And he: "Mr. Gilland is a young man who—er—lacks practical experience."

And she: "Mr. Gilland has been most thoughtful for my comfort. The journey has been perfectly heavenly."

And he, clumsily: "Ahem!—the—er—celestial aspect of your journey has—er—doubtless been colored by—er—the prospect of your—er—approaching nuptials—"

She, hastily: "Oh, I do not think so, professor."

"Idiot!" I muttered, dragging the dog to the shore, where his yelps brought the professor hurrying.

"Is *that* the dog?" he inquired, adjusting his spectacles.

"That's the dog," I said. "He's full of points, you see?"

"Oh," mused the professor; "I thought he was full of—" He hesitated, inspecting the animal, who, nose to the ground, stood investigating a smell of some sort.

"See," I said, with enthusiasm, "he's found a scent; he's trailing it already! Now he's rolling on it!"

"He's rolling on one of our concentrated food lozenges," said the professor, dryly. "Tie him up, Mr. Gilland, and ask Mrs. Gilland to come up to camp. Your room is ready."

"Rooms," I corrected; "she isn't Mrs. Gilland yet," I added, with a forced smile.

"But you're practically married," observed the professor, "as you pointed out to me. And if she's practically Mrs. Gilland, why not say so?"

"Don't, all the same," I snarled.

"But marriages are made in—"

I cast a desperate eye upon him.

From that moment, whenever we were alone together, he made a target of me. I never had supposed him humorously vindictive; he was, and his apparently innocent mistakes almost turned my hair gray.

But to Miss Barrison he was kind and courteous, and for a time overserious. Observing him, I could never detect the slightest symptom of dislike for her sex—a failing which common rumor had always credited him with to the verge of absolute rudeness.

On the contrary, it was perfectly plain to anybody that he liked her. There was in his manner towards her a mixture of business formality and the deferential attitude of a gentleman.

We were seated, just before sunset, outside of the hut built of palmetto logs, when Professor Farrago, addressing us both, began the explanation of our future duties.

Miss Barrison, it appeared, was to note everything said by himself, making several shorthand copies by evening. In other words, she was to report every scrap of conversation she heard while in the Everglades. And she nodded intelligently as he finished, and drew pad and pencil from the pocket of her walking-skirt, jotting down his instructions as a beginning. I could see that he was pleased.

"The reason I do this," he said, "is because I do not wish to hide anything that transpires while we are on this expedition. Only the most scrupulously minute record can satisfy me; no details are too small to merit record; I demand and I court from my fellow-scientists and from the public the fullest investigation."

He smiled slightly, turning towards me.

"You know, Mr. Gilland, how dangerous to the reputation of a scientific man is any line of investigation into the unusual. If a man once is even suspected of charlatanism, of sensationalism, of turning his attention to any phenomena not strictly within the proper pale of scientific investigation, that man is doomed to ridicule; his profession disowns him; he becomes a man without honor, without authority. Is it not so?"

"Yes," I said.

"Therefore," he resumed, thoughtfully, "as I do most firmly believe in the course I am now pursuing, whether I succeed or fail I desire a true and minute record made, hiding nothing of what may be said or done. A stenographer alone can give this to the world, while I can only supplement it with a description of events—if I live to transcribe them."

Sunk in profound reverie he sat there silent under the great, smooth palm-tree—a venerable figure in his yellow dressing-gown and carpet slippers. Seated side by side, we waited, a trifle awed. I could hear the soft breathing of the pretty stenographer beside me.

"First of all," said Professor Farrago, looking up, "I must be able to trust those who are here to aid me."

"I—I will be faithful," said the girl, in a low voice.

"I do not doubt you, my child," he said; "nor you, Gilland. And so I am going to tell you this much now—more, I hope, later."

And he sat up straight, lifting an impressive forefinger.

"Mr. Rowan, lately an officer of our Coast Survey, wrote me a letter from the Holland House in New York—a letter so strange that, on reading it, I immediately repaired to his hotel, where for hours we talked together.

"The result of that conference is this expedition.

"I have now been here two months, and I am satisfied of certain facts. First, there do exist in this unexplored wilderness certain forms of life which are solid and palpable, but transparent and practically invisible. Second, these living creatures belong to the animal kingdom, are warm-blooded vertebrates, possess powers of locomotion, but whether that of flight I am not certain. Third, they appear to possess such senses as we enjoy—smell, touch, sight, hearing, and no doubt the sense of taste. Fourth, their skin is smooth to the touch, and the temperature of the epidermis appears to approximate that of a normal human being. Fifth and last, whether bipeds or quadrupeds I do not know, though all evidence appears to confirm my theory that they walk erect. One pair of their limbs appear to terminate in a sort of foot—like a delicately shaped human foot, except that there appear to be no toes. The other pair of limbs terminate in something that, from the single instance I experienced, seemed to resemble soft but firm antennae or, perhaps, digitated palpi—"

"Feelers!" I blurted out.

"I don't know, but I think so. Once, when I was standing in the forest, perfectly aware that creatures I could not see had stealthily surrounded me, the tension was brought to a crisis when over my face, from cheek to chin, stole a soft something, brushing the skin as delicately as a child's fingers might brush it."

"Good Lord!" I breathed.

A care-worn smile crept into his eyes. "A test for nerves, you think, Mr. Gilland? I agree with you. Nobody fears what anybody can see."

There came the slightest movement beside me.

"Are you trembling?" I asked, turning.

"I was writing," she replied, steadily. "Did my elbow touch you?"

"By-the-way," said Professor Farrago, "I fear I forgot to congratulate you upon your choice of a stenographer, Mr. Gilland."

A rosy light stole over her pale face.

"Am I to record that too?" she asked, raising her blue eyes.

"Certainly," he replied, gravely.

"But, professor," I began, a prey to increasing excitement, "do you propose to attempt the capture of one of these animals?"

"That is what the cage is for," he said. "I supposed you had guessed that."

"I had," murmured the pretty stenographer.

"I do not doubt it," said Professor Farrago, gravely.

"What are the chemicals for—and the tank and hose attachment?"

"Think, Mr. Gilland."

"I can't; I'm almost stunned by what you tell me."

He laughed. "The rosium oxide and salts of strontium are to be dumped into the tank together. They'll effervesce, of course."

"Of course," I muttered.

"And I can throw a rose-colored spray over any object by the hose attachment, can't I?"

"Yes."

"Well, I tried it on a transparent jelly-fish and it became perfectly visible and of a beautiful rose-color: and I tried it on rock-crystal, and on glass, and on pure gelatine, and all became suffused with a delicate pink glow, which lasted for hours or minutes according to the substance. . . . Now you understand, don't you?"

"Yes; you want to see what sort of creature you have to deal with."

"Exactly; so when I've trapped it I am going to spray it." He turned half humorously towards the stenographer: "I fancy you understood long before Mr. Gilland did."

"I don't think so," she said, with a sidelong lifting of the heavy lashes; and I caught the color of her eyes for a second.

"You see how Miss Barrison spares your feelings," observed Professor Farrago, dryly. "She owes you little gratitude for bringing her here, yet she proves a generous victim."

"Oh, I am very grateful for this rarest of chances!" she said, shyly. "To be among the first in the world to discover such wonders ought to make me very grateful to the man who gave me the opportunity."

"Do you mean Mr. Gilland?" asked the professor, laughing.

I had never before seen Professor Farrago laugh such a care-free laugh; I had never suspected him of harboring even an embryo of the social graces. Dry as dust, sapless as steel, precise as the magnetic needle, he had hitherto been to me the mummified embodiment of science militant. Now, in the guise of a perfectly human and genial old gentleman, I scarcely recognized my superior of the Bronx Park society. And as a woman-hater he was a miserable failure.

"Heavens," I thought to myself, "am I becoming jealous of my revered professor's social success with a stray stenographer?" I felt mean, and I probably looked it, and I was glad that telepathy did not permit Miss Barrison to record my secret and unworthy ruminations.

The professor was saying: "These transparent creatures break off berries and fruits and branches; I have seen a flower, too, plucked from its stem by invisible digits and borne swiftly through the forest—only the flower visible, apparently speeding through the air and out of sight among the thickets.

"I have found the footprints that I described to you, usually on the edge of a stream or in the soft loam along some forest lake or lost lagoon.

"Again and again I have been conscious in the forest that unseen eyes were fixed on me, that unseen shapes were following me. Never but that one time did these invisible creatures close in around me and venture to touch me.

"They may be weak; their structure may be frail, and they may be incapable of violence or harm, but the depth of the footprints indicates a weight of at least one hundred and thirty pounds, and it certainly requires some muscular strength to break off a branch of wild guavas."

He bent his noble head, thoughtfully regarding the design on his slippers.

"What was the rifle for?" I asked.

"Defence, not aggression," he said, simply.

"And the camera?"

"A camera record is necessary in these days of bad artists."

I hesitated, glancing at Miss Barrison. She was still writing, her pretty head bent over the pad in her lap.

"And the clothing?" I asked, carelessly.

"Did you get it?" he demanded.

"Of course—" I glanced at Miss Barrison. "There's no use writing down everything, is there?"

"Everything must be recorded," said Professor Farrago, inflexibly. "What clothing did you buy?"

"I forgot the gown," I said, getting red about the ears.

"Forgot the gown!" he repeated.

"Yes—one kind of gown—the day kind. I—I got the other kind."

He was annoyed; so was I. After a moment he got up, and crossing to the log cabin, opened one of the boxes of apparel.

"Is it what you wanted?" I inquired.

"Y-es, I presume so," he replied, visibly perplexed.

"It's the best to be had," said I.

"That's quite right," he said, musingly. "We use only the best of everything at Bronx Park. It is traditional with us, you know."

Curiosity pushed me. "Well, what on earth is it for?" I broke out.

He looked at me gravely over the tops of his spectacles—a striking and inspiring figure in his yellow flannel dressing-gown and slippers.

"I shall tell you some day—perhaps," he said, mildly. "Good-night, Miss Barrison; good-night, Mr. Gilland. You will find extra blankets on your bunk—"

"What!" I cried.

"Bunks," he said, and shut the door.

XVI

"There is something weird about this whole proceeding," I observed to the pretty stenographer next morning.

"These pies will be weird if you don't stop talking to me," she said, opening the doors of Professor Farrago's portable camping-oven and peeping in at the fragrant pastry.

The professor had gone off somewhere into the woods early that morning. As he was not in the habit of talking to himself, the services of Miss Barrison were not required. Before he started, however, he came to her with a request for a dozen pies, the construction of which he asked if she understood. She had been to cooking-school in more prosperous days, and she mentioned it; so at his earnest solicitation she undertook to bake for him twelve apple-pies; and she was now attempting it, assisted by advice from me.

"Are they burned?" I asked, sniffing the air.

"No, they are not burned, Mr. Gilland, but my finger is," she retorted, stepping back to examine the damage.

I offered sympathy and witch-hazel, but she would have none of my offerings, and presently returned to her pies.

"We can't eat all that pastry," I protested.

"Professor Farrago said they were not for us to eat," she said, dusting each pie with powdered sugar.

"Well, what are they for? The dog? Or are they simply objets d'art to adorn the shanty—"

"You annoy me," she said.

"The pies annoy me; won't you tell me what they're for?"

"I have a pretty fair idea what they're for," she observed, tossing her head. "Haven't you?"

"No. What?"

"These pies are for bait."

"To bait hooks with?" I exclaimed.

"Hooks! No, you silly man. They're for baiting the cage. He means to trap these transparent creatures in a cage baited with pie."

She laughed scornfully; inserted the burned tip of her finger in her mouth and stood looking at me defiantly like a flushed and bright-eyed school-girl.

"You think you're teasing me," she said; "but you do not realize what a singularly slow-minded young man you are."

I stopped laughing. "How did you come to the conclusion that pies were to be used for such a purpose?" I asked.

"I deduce," she observed, with an airy wave of her disengaged hand.

"Your deductions are weird—like everything else in this vicinity. Pies to catch invisible monsters? Pooh!"

"You're not particularly complimentary, are you?" she said.

"Not particularly; but I could be, with you for my inspiration. I could even be enthusiastic—"

"About my pies?"

"No—about your eyes."

"You are very frivolous—for a scientist," she said scornfully; "please subdue your enthusiasm and bring me some wood. This fire is almost out."

When I had brought the wood, she presented me with a pail of hot water and pointed at the dishes on the breakfast-table.

"Never!" I cried, revolted.

"Then I suppose I must do them—"

She looked pensively at her scorched finger-tip, and, pursing up her lips, blew a gentle breath to cool it.

"I'll do the dishes," I said.

Splashing and slushing the cups and saucers about in the hot water, I reflected upon the events of the last few days. The dog, stupefied by unwonted abundance of food, lay in the sunshine, sleeping the sleep of repletion; the pretty stenographer, all rosy from her culinary exertions, was removing the pies and setting them in neat rows to cool.

"There," she said, with a sigh; "now I will dry the dishes for you. . . . You didn't mention the fact, when you engaged me, that I was also expected to do general housework."

"I didn't engage you," I said, maliciously; "you engaged me, you know."

She regarded me disdainfully, nose uptilted.

"How thoroughly disagreeable you can be!" she said. "Dry your own dishes. I'm going for a stroll."

"May I join—"

"You may *not!* I shall go so far that you cannot possibly discover me."

I watched her forestward progress; she sauntered for about thirty yards along the lake and presently sat down in plain sight under a huge live-oak.

A few moments later I had completed my task as general bottle-washer, and I cast about for something to occupy me.

First I approached and politely caressed the satiated dog. He woke up, regarded me with dully meditative eyes, yawned, and went to sleep again. Never a flop of tail to indicate gratitude for blandishments, never the faintest symptom of canine appreciation.

Chilled by my reception, I moused about for a while, poking into boxes and bundles; then raised my head and inspected the landscape. Through the vista of trees the pink shirt-waist of the pretty stenographer glimmered like a rose blooming in the wilderness.

From whatever point I viewed the prospect that pink spot seemed to intrude; I turned my back and examined the jungle, but there it was repeated in a hundred pink blossoms among the massed thickets; I looked up into the tree-tops, where pink mosses spotted the palms; I looked out over the lake, and I saw it in my mind's eye pinker than ever. It was certainly a case of pink-eye.

"I'll go for a stroll, too; it's a free country," I muttered.

After I had strolled in a complete circle I found myself within three feet of a pink shirt-waist.

"I beg your pardon," I said; "I had no inten—"

"I thought you were never coming," she said, amiably.

"How is your finger?" I asked.

She held it up. I took it gingerly; it was smooth and faintly rosy at the tip.

"Does it hurt?" I inquired.

"Dreadfully. Your hands feel so cool—"

After a silence she said, "Thank you, that has cooled the burning."

"I am determined," said I, "to expel the fire from your finger if it takes hours and hours." And I seated myself with that intention.

For a while she talked, making innocent observations concerning the tropical foliage surrounding us. Then silence crept in between us, accentuated by the brooding stillness of the forest.

"I am afraid your hands are growing tired," she said, considerately.

I denied it.

Through the vista of palms we could see the lake, blue as a violet, sparkling with silvery sunshine. In the intense quiet the splash of leaping mullet sounded distinctly.

Once a tall crane stalked into view among the sedges; once an unseen alligator shook the silence with his deep, hollow roaring. Then the stillness of the wilderness grew more intense.

We had been sitting there for a long while without exchanging a word, dreamily watching the ripple of the azure water, when all at once there came a scurrying patter of feet through the forest, and, looking up, I beheld the hound-dog, tail between his legs, bearing down on us at lightning speed. I rose instantly.

"What is the matter with the dog?" cried the pretty stenographer. "Is he going mad, Mr. Gilland?"

"Something has scared him," I exclaimed, as the dog, eyes like lighted candles, rushed frantically between my legs and buried his head in Miss Barrison's lap.

"Poor doggy!" she said, smoothing the collapsed pup; "poor, p-oor little beast! Did anything scare him? Tell aunty all about it."

When a dog flees *without yelping* he's a badly frightened creature. I instinctively started back towards the camp whence the beast had fled, and before I had taken a dozen steps Miss Barrison was beside me, carrying the dog in her arms.

"I've an idea," she said, under her breath.

"What?" I asked, keeping my eyes on the camp.

"It's this: I'll wager that we find those pies gone!"

"Pies gone?" I repeated, perplexed; "what makes you think—"

"They *are* gone!" she exclaimed. "Look!"

I gaped stupidly at the rough pine table where the pies had stood in three neat rows of four each. And then, in a moment, the purport of this robbery flashed upon my senses.

"The transparent creatures!" I gasped.

"Hush!" she whispered, clinging to the trembling dog in her arms.

I listened. I could hear nothing, see nothing, yet slowly I became convinced of the presence of something unseen—something in the forest close by, watching us out of invisible eyes.

A chill, settling along my spine, crept upward to my scalp, until every separate hair wiggled to the roots. Miss Barrison was pale, but perfectly calm and self-possessed.

"Let us go in-doors," I said, as steadily as I could.

"Very well," she replied.

I held the door open; she entered with the dog; I followed, closing and barring the door, and then took my station at the window, rifle in hand.

There was not a sound in the forest. Miss Barrison laid the dog on the floor and quietly picked up her pad and pencil. Presently she was deep in a report of the phenomena, her pencil flying, leaf after leaf from the pad fluttering to the floor.

Nor did I at the window change my position of scared alertness, until I was aware of her hand gently touching my elbow to attract my attention, and her soft voice at my ear—

"You don't suppose by any chance that the dog ate those pies?"

I collected my tumultuous thoughts and turned to stare at the dog.

"Twelve pies, twelve inches each in diameter," she reflected, musingly. "One dog, twenty inches in diameter. How many times will the pies go into the dog? Let me see." She made a few figures on her pad, thought awhile, produced a tape-measure from her pocket, and, kneeling down, measured the dog.

"No," she said, looking up at me, "he couldn't contain them."

Inspired by her coolness and perfect composure, I set the rifle in the corner and opened the door. Sunlight fell in bars through the quiet woods; nothing stirred on land or water save the great, yellow-striped butterflies that fluttered and soared and floated above the flowering thickets bordering the jungle.

The heat became intense; Miss Barrison went to her room to change her gown for a lighter one; I sat down under a live-oak, eyes and ears strained for any sign of our invisible neighbors.

When she emerged in the lightest and filmiest of summer gowns, she brought the camera with her; and for a while we took pictures of each other, until we had used up all but one film.

Desiring to possess a picture of Miss Barrison and myself seated together, I tied a string to the shutter-lever and attached the other end of the string to the dog, who had resumed his interrupted slumbers. At my whistle he jumped up nervously, snapping the lever, and the picture was taken.

With such innocent and harmless pastime we whiled away the afternoon. She made twelve more apple-pies. I mounted guard over them. And we were just beginning to feel a trifle uneasy about Professor Farrago, when he appeared, tramping sturdily through the forest, green umbrella and butterfly-net under one arm, shot-gun and cyanide-jar under the other, and his breast all criss-crossed with straps, from which dangled field-glasses, collecting-boxes, and botanizing-tins—an inspiring figure indeed—the embodied symbol of science indomitable, triumphant!

We hailed him with three guilty cheers; the dog woke up with a perfunctory bark—the first sound I had heard from him since he yelped his disapproval of me on the lagoon.

Miss Barrison produced three bowls full of boiling water and dropped three pellets of concentrated soup-meat into them, while I prepared coffee. And in a few moments our simple dinner was ready—the red ants had been dusted from the biscuits, the spiders chased off the baked beans, the scorpions shaken from the napkins, and we sat down at the rough, improvised table under the palms.

The professor gave us a brief but modest account of his short tour of exploration. He had brought back a new species of orchid, several undescribed beetles, and a pocketful of coontie seed. He appeared, however, to be tired and singularly depressed, and presently we learned why.

It seemed that he had gone straight to that section of the forest where he had hitherto always found signs of the transparent and invisible creatures which he had determined to capture, and he had not found a single trace of them.

"It alarms me," he said, gravely. "If they have deserted this region, it might take a lifetime to locate them again in this wilderness."

Then, very quietly, sinking her voice instinctively, as though the unseen might be at our very elbows listening, Miss Barrison recounted the curious adventure which had befallen the dog and the first batch of apple-pies.

With visible and increasing excitement the professor listened until the very end. Then he struck the table with clinched fist—a resounding blow which set the concentrated soup dancing in the bowls and scattered the biscuits and the industrious red ants in every direction.

"Eureka!" he whispered. "Miss Barrison, your deduction was not only perfectly reasonable, but brilliant. You are right; the pies are for that very purpose. I conceived the idea when I first came here. Again and again the pies that my guide made out of dried apples disappeared in a most astonishing and mysterious manner when left to cool. At length I determined to watch them every second; and did so, with the result that late one afternoon I was amazed to see a pie slowly rise from the table and move swiftly away through the air about four feet above the ground, finally disappearing into a tangle of jasmine and grape-vine.

"The apparently automatic flight of that pie solved the problem; these transparent creatures cannot resist that delicacy. Therefore I decided to bait the cage for them this very night— Look! What's the matter with that dog?"

The dog suddenly bounded into the air, alighted on all fours, ears, eyes, and muzzle concentrated on a point directly behind us.

"Good gracious! The pies!" faltered Miss Barrison, half rising from her seat; but the dog rushed madly into her skirts, scrambling for protection, and she fell back almost into my arms.

Clasping her tightly, I looked over my shoulder; the last pie was snatched from the table before my eyes and I saw it borne swiftly away by something unseen, straight into the deepening shadows of the forest.

The professor was singularly calm, even slightly ironical, as he turned to me, saying:

"Perhaps if you relinquish Miss Barrison she may be able to free herself from that dog."

I did so immediately, and she deposited the cowering dog in my arms. Her face had suddenly become pink.

I passed the dog on to Professor Farrago, dumping it viciously into his lap—a proceeding which struck me as resembling the pastime of extreme youth known as "button, button, who's got the button?"

The professor examined the animal gravely, feeling its pulse, counting its respirations, and finally inserting a tentative finger in an attempt to examine its tongue. The dog bit him.

"Ouch! It's a clear case of fright," he said, gravely. "I wanted a dog to aid me in trailing these remarkable creatures, but I think this dog of yours is useless, Gilland."

"It's given us warning of the creatures' presence twice already," I argued.

"Poor little thing," said Miss Barrison, softly; "I don't know why, but I love that dog. . . . He has eyes like yours, Mr. Gilland—"

Exasperated, I rose from the table. "He's got eyes like holes burned in a blanket!" I said. "And if ever a flicker of intelligence lighted them I have failed to observe it."

The professor regarded me dreamily. "We ought to have more pies," he observed. "Perhaps if you carried the oven into the shanty—"

"Certainly," said Miss Barrison; "we can lock the door while I make twelve more pies."

I carried the portable camping-oven into the cabin, connected the patent asbestos chimney-pipes, and lighted the fire. And in a few minutes Miss Barrison, sleeves rolled up and pink apron pinned under her chin, was busily engaged in rolling pie-crust, while Professor Farrago measured out spices and set the dried apples to soak.

The swift Southern twilight had already veiled the forest as I stepped out of the cabin to smoke a cigar and promenade a bit and cogitate. A last trace of color lingering in the west faded out as I looked; the gray glimmer deepened into darkness, through which the white lake vapors floated in thin, wavering strata across the water.

For a while the frog's symphony dominated all other sounds, then lagoon and forest and cypress branch awoke; and through the steadily sustained tumult of woodland voices I could hear the dry bark of the fox-squirrel, the whistle of the raccoon, ducks softly quacking or whimpering as they prepared for sleep among the reeds, the soft booming of bitterns, the clattering gossip of the heronry, the Southern whippoorwill's incessant call.

At regular intervals the howling note of a lone heron echoed the strident screech of a crimson-crested crane; the horned owl's savage hunting-cry haunted the night, now near, now floating from infinite distances.

And after a while I became aware of a nearer sound, low-pitched but ceaseless—the hum of thousands of lesser living creatures blending to a steady monotone.

Then the theatrical moon came up through filmy draperies of waving Spanish moss thin as cobwebs; and far in the wilderness a cougar fell a-crying and coughing like a little child with a bad cold.

I went in after that. Miss Barrison was sitting before the oven, knees gathered in her clasped hands, languidly studying the fire. She looked up as I appeared, opened the oven-doors, sniffed the aroma, and resumed her attitude of contented indifference.

"Where is the professor?" I asked.

"He has retired. He's been talking in his sleep at moments."

"Better take it down; that's what you're here for," I observed, closing and holding the outside door. "Ugh! there's a chill in the air. The dew is pelting down from the pines like a steady fall of rain."

"You will get fever if you roam about at night," she said. "Mercy! your coat is soaking. Sit here by the fire."

So I pulled up a bench and sat down beside her like the traditional spider.

"Miss Muffitt," I said, "don't let me frighten you away—"

"I was going anyhow—"

"Please don't."

"Why?" she demanded, reseating herself.

"Because I like to sit beside you," I said, truthfully.

"Your avowal is startling and not to be substantiated by facts," she remarked, resting her chin on one hand and gazing into the fire.

"You mean because I went for a stroll by moonlight? I did that because you always seem to make fun of me as soon as the professor joins us."

"Make fun of you? You surely don't expect me to make eyes at you!"

There was a silence; I toasted my shins, thoughtfully.

"How is your burned finger?" I asked.

She lifted it for my inspection, and I began a protracted examination.

"What would you prescribe?" she inquired, with an absent-minded glance at the professor's closed door.

"I don't know; perhaps a slight but firm pressure of the finger-tips—"

"You tried that this afternoon."

"But the dog interrupted us—"

"Interrupted *you.* Besides—"

"What?"

"I don't think you ought to," she said.

Sitting there before the oven, side by side, hand innocently clasped in hand, we heard the drumming of the dew on the roof, the night-wind stirring the palms, the muffled snoring of the professor, the faint whisper and crackle of the fire.

A single candle burned brightly, piling our shadows together on the wall behind us; moonlight silvered the window-panes, over which crawled multitudes of soft-winged moths, attracted by the candle within.

"See their tiny eyes glow!" she whispered. "How their wings quiver! And all for a candle-flame! Alas! alas! fire is the undoing of us all."

She leaned forward, resting as though buried in reverie. After a while she extended one foot a trifle and, with the point of her shoe, carefully unlatched the oven-door. As it swung outward a delicious fragrance filled the room.

"They're done," she said, withdrawing her hand from mine. "Help me to lift them out."

Together we arranged the delicious pastry in rows on the bench to cool. I opened the door for a few minutes, then closed and bolted it again.

"Do you suppose those transparent creatures will smell the odor and come around the cabin?" she suggested, wiping her fingers on her handkerchief.

I walked to the window uneasily. Outside the pane the moths crawled, some brilliant in scarlet and tan-color set with black, some snow-white with black tracings on their wings, and bodies peacock-blue edged with orange. The scientist in me was aroused; I called her to the window, and she came and leaned against the sill, nose pressed to the glass.

"I don't suppose you know that the antennae of that silvery-winged moth are distinctly pectinate," I said.

"Of course I do," she said. "I took my degree as D.E. at Barnard College."

"What!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "You've been through Barnard? You are a Doctor of Entomology?"

"It was my undoing," she said. "The department was abolished the year I graduated. There was no similar vacancy, even in the Smithsonian."

She shrugged her shoulders, eyes fixed on the moths. "I had to make my own living. I chose stenography as the quickest road to self-sustenance."

She looked up, a flush on her cheeks.

"I suppose you took me for an inferior?" she said. "But do you suppose I'd flirt with you if I was?"

She pressed her face to the pane again, murmuring that exquisite poem of Andrew Lang:

"Spooning is innocuous and needn't have a sequel,
But recollect, if spoon you must, spoon only with your
equal."

Standing there, watching the moths, we became rather silent—I don't know why.

The fire in the range had gone out; the candle-flame, flaring above a saucer of melted wax, sank lower and lower.

Suddenly, as though disturbed by something inside, the moths all left the window-pane, darting off in the darkness.

"That's curious," I said.

"What's curious?" she asked, opening her eyes languidly. "Good gracious! Was that a bat that beat on the window?"

"I saw nothing," I said, disturbed. "Listen!"

A soft sound against the glass, as though invisible fingers were feeling the pane—a gentle rubbing—then a tap-tap, all but inaudible.

"Is it a bird? Can you see?" she whispered.

The candle-flame behind us flashed and expired. Moonlight flooded the pane. The sounds continued, but there was nothing there.

We understood now what it was that so gently rubbed and patted the glass outside. With one accord we noiselessly gathered up the pies and carried them into my room.

Then she walked to the door of her room, turned, held out her hand, and whispering, "Good-night! A demain, monsieur!" slipped into her room and softly closed the door.

And all night long I lay in troubled slumber beside the pies, a rifle resting on the blankets beside me, a revolver under my pillow. And I dreamed of moths with brilliant eyes and vast silvery wings harnessed to a balloon in which Miss Barrison and I sat, arms around each other, eating slice after slice of apple-pie.

XVII

Dawn came—the dawn of a day that I am destined never to forget. Long, rosy streamers of light broke through the forest, shaking, quivering, like unstable beams from celestial search-lights. Mist floated upward from marsh and lake; and through it the spectral palms loomed, drooping fronds embroidered with dew.

For a while the ringing outburst of bird music dominated all; but it soon ceased with dropping notes from the crimson cardinals repeated in lengthening minor intervals; and then the spell of silence returned, broken only by the faint splash of mullet, mocking the sun with sinuous, silver flashes.

"Good-morning," said a low voice from the door as I stood encouraging the camp-fire with splinter wood and dead palmetto fans.

Fresh and sweet from her toilet as a dew-drenched rose, Miss Barrison stood there sniffing the morning air daintily, thoroughly.

"Too much perfume," she said—"too much like ylang-ylang in a department-store. Central Park smells sweeter on an April morning."

"Are you criticising the wild jasmine?" I asked.

"I'm criticising an exotic smell. Am I not permitted to comment on the tropics?"

Fishing out a cedar log from the lumber-stack, I fell to chopping it vigorously. The axe-strokes made a cheerful racket through the woods.

"Did you hear anything last night after you retired?" I asked.

"Something was at my window—something that thumped softly and seemed to be feeling all over the glass. To tell you the truth, I was silly enough to remain dressed all night."

"You don't look it," I said.

"Oh, when daylight came I had a chance," she added, laughing.

"All the same," said I, leaning on the axe and watching her, "you are about the coolest and pluckiest woman I ever knew."

"We were all in the same fix," she said, modestly.

"No, we were not. Now I'll tell you the truth—my hair stood up the greater part of the night. You are looking upon a poltroon, Miss Barrison."

"Then there was something at your window, too?"

"Something? A dozen! They were monkeying with the sashes and panes all night long, and I imagined that I could hear them breathing—as though from effort of intense eagerness. Ouch! I came as near losing my nerve as I care to. I came within an ace of hurling those cursed pies through the window at them. I'd bolt to-day if I wasn't afraid to play the coward."

"Most people are brave for that reason," she said.

The dog, who had slept under my bunk, and who had contributed to my entertainment by sighing and moaning all night, now appeared ready for business—business in his case being the operation of feeding. I presented him with a concentrated tablet, which he cautiously investigated and then rolled on.

"Nice testimonial for the people who concocted it," I said, in disgust. "I wish I had an egg."

"There are some concentrated egg tablets in the shanty," said Miss Barrison; but the idea was not attractive.

"I refuse to fry a pill for breakfast," I said, sullenly, and set the coffee-pot on the coals.

In spite of the dewy beauty of the morning, breakfast was not a cheerful function. Professor Farrago appeared, clad in sun-helmet and khaki. I had seldom seen him depressed; but he was now, and his very efforts to disguise it only emphasized his visible anxiety.

His preparations for the day, too, had an ominous aspect to me. He gave his orders and we obeyed, instinctively suppressing questions. First, he and I transported all personal luggage of the company to the big electric launch—Miss Barrison's effects, his, and my own. His private papers, the stenographic reports, and all memoranda were tied up together and carried aboard.

Then, to my surprise, two weeks' concentrated rations for two and mineral water sufficient for the same period were stowed away aboard the launch. Several times he asked me whether I knew how to run the boat, and I assured him that I did.

In a short time nothing was left ashore except the bare furnishings of the cabin, the female wearing-apparel, the steel cage and chemicals which I had brought, and the twelve apple-pies—the latter under lock and key in my room.

As the preparations came to an end, the professor's gentle melancholy seemed to deepen. Once I ventured to ask him if he was indisposed, and he replied that he had never felt in better physical condition.

Presently he bade me fetch the pies; and I brought them, and, at a sign from him, placed them inside the steel cage, closing and locking the door.

"I believe," he said, glancing from Miss Barrison to me, and from me to the dog—"I believe that we are ready to start."

He went to the cabin and locked the door on the outside, pocketing the key.

Then he backed up to the steel cage, stooped and lifted his end as I lifted mine, and together we started off through the forest, bearing the cage between us as porters carry a heavy piece of luggage.

Miss Barrison came next, carrying the trousseau, the tank, hose, and chemicals; and the dog followed her—probably not from affection for us, but because he was afraid to be left alone.

We walked in silence, the professor and I keeping an instinctive lookout for snakes; but we encountered nothing of that sort. On every side, touching our shoulders, crowded the closely woven and impenetrable tangle of the jungle; and we threaded it along a narrow path which he, no doubt, had cut, for the machete marks were still fresh, and the blazes on hickory, live-oak, and palm were all wet with dripping sap, and swarming with eager, brilliant butterflies.

At times across our course flowed shallow, rapid streams of water, clear as crystal, and most alluring to the thirsty.

"There's fever in every drop," said the professor, as I mentioned my thirst; "take the bottled water if you mean to stay a little longer."

"Stay where?" I asked.

"On earth," he replied, tersely; and we marched on.

The beauty of the tropics is marred somewhat for me; under all the fresh splendor of color death lurks in brilliant tints. Where painted fruit hangs temptingly, where great, silky blossoms exhale alluring scent, where the elaps coils inlaid with scarlet, black, and saffron, where in the shadow of a palmetto frond a succession of velvety black diamonds mark the rattler's swollen length, there death is; and his invisible consort, horror, creeps where the snake whose mouth is lined with white creeps—where the tarantula squats, hairy, motionless; where a bit of living enamel fringed with orange undulates along a mossy log.

Thinking of these things, and watchful lest, unawares, terror unfold from some blossoming and leafy covert, I scarcely noticed the beauty of the glade we had entered—a long oval, cross-barred with sunshine which fell on hedges of scrub-palmetto, chin high, interlaced with golden blossoms of the jasmine. And all around, like pillars supporting a high green canopy above a throne, towered the silvery stems of palms fretted with pale, rose-tinted lichens and hung with draperies of grape-vine.

"This is the place," said Professor Farrago.

His quiet, passionless voice sounded strange to me; his words seemed strange, too, each one heavily weighted with hidden meaning.

We set the cage on the ground; he unlocked and opened the steel-barred door, and, kneeling, carefully arranged the pies along the centre of the cage.

"I have a curious presentiment," he said, "that I shall not come out of this experiment unscathed."

"Don't, for Heaven's sake, say that!" I broke out, my nerves on edge again.

"Why not?" he asked, surprised. "I am not afraid."

"Not afraid to die?" I demanded, exasperated.

"Who spoke of dying?" he inquired, mildly. "What I said was that I do not expect to come out of this affair unscathed."

I did not comprehend his meaning, but I understood the reproof conveyed.

He closed and locked the cage door again and came towards us, balancing the key across the palm of his hand.

Miss Barrison had seated herself on the leaves; I stood back as the professor sat down beside her; then, at a gesture from him, took the place he indicated on his left.

"Before we begin," he said, calmly, "there are several things you ought to know and which I have not yet told you. The first concerns the feminine wearing apparel which Mr. Gilland brought me."

He turned to Miss Barrison and asked her whether she had brought a complete outfit, and she opened the bundle on her knees and handed it to him.

"I cannot," he said, "delicately explain in so many words what use I expect to make of this apparel. Nor do I yet know whether I shall have any use at all for it. That can only be a theoretical speculation until, within a few more hours, my theory is proven or disproven—and," he said, suddenly turning on me, "my theory concerning these invisible creatures is the most extraordinary and audacious theory ever entertained by man since Columbus presumed that there must lie somewhere a hidden continent which nobody has ever seen."

He passed his hand over his protruding forehead, lost for a moment in deepest reflection. Then, "Have you ever heard of the Sphyx?" he asked.

"It seems to me that Ponce de Leon wrote of something—" I began, hesitating.

"Yes, the famous lines in the third volume which have set so many wise men guessing. You recall them:

> "'And there, alas! within sound of the Fountain of Youth whose waters tint the skin till the whole body glows softly like the petal of a rose—there, alas! in the new world already blooming, THE ETERNAL ENIGMA I beheld, in the flesh living; yet it faded even as I looked, although I swear it lived and breathed. This is the Sphyx.'"

A silence; then I said, "Those lines are meaningless to me."

"Not to me," said Miss Barrison, softly.

The professor looked at her. "Ah, child! Ever subtler, ever surer—the Eternal Enigma is no enigma to you."

"What is the Sphyx?" I asked.

"Have you read De Soto? Or Goya?"

"Yes, both. I remember now that De Soto records the Syachas legend of the Sphyx—something about a goddess—"

"Not a goddess," said Miss Barrison, her lips touched with a smile.

"Sometimes," said the professor, gently. "And Goya said:

> "'It has come to my ears while in the lands of the Syachas that the Sphyx surely lives, as bolder and more curious men than I may, God willing, prove to the world hereafter.'"

"But what is the Sphyx?" I insisted.

"For centuries wise men and savants have asked each other that question. I have answered it for myself; I am now to prove it, I trust."

His face darkened, and again and again he stroked his heavy brow.

"If anything occurs," he said, taking my hand in his left and Miss Barrison's hand in his right, "promise me to obey my wishes. Will you?"

"Yes," we said, together.

"If I lose my life, or—or disappear, promise me on your honor to get to the electric launch as soon as possible and make all speed northward, placing my private papers, the reports of Miss Barrison, and your own reports in the hands of the authorities in Bronx Park. Don't attempt to aid me, don't delay to search for me. Do you promise?"

"Yes," we breathed together.

He looked at us solemnly. "If you fail me, you betray me," he said.

We swore obedience.

"Then let us begin," he said, and he rose and went to the steel cage. Unlocking the door, he flung it wide and stepped inside, leaving the cage door open.

"The moment a single pie is disturbed," he said to me, "I shall close the steel door from the inside, and you and Miss Barrison will then dump the rosium oxide and the strontium into the tank, clap on the lid, turn the nozzle of the hose on the cage, and spray it thoroughly. Whatever is invisible in the cage will become visible and of a faint rose color. And when the trapped creature becomes visible, hold yourselves ready to aid me as long as I am able to give you orders. After that either all will go well or all will go otherwise, and you must run for the launch." He seated himself in the cage near the open door.

I placed the steel tank near the cage, uncoiled the hose attachment, unscrewed the top, and dumped in the salts of strontium. Miss Barrison unwrapped the bottle of rosium oxide and loosened the cork. We examined this pearl-and-pink powder and shook it up so that it might run out quickly. Then Miss Barrison sat down, and presently became absorbed in a stenographic report of the proceedings up to date.

When Miss Barrison finished her report she handed me the bundle of papers. I stowed them away in my wallet, and we sat down together beside the tank.

Inside the cage Professor Farrago was seated, his spectacled eyes fixed on the row of pies. For a while, although realizing perfectly that our quarry was transparent and invisible, we unconsciously strained our eyes in quest of something stirring in the forest.

"I should think," said I, in a low voice, "that the odor of the pies might draw at least one out of the odd dozen that came rubbing up against my window last night."

"Hush! Listen!" she breathed. But we heard nothing save the snoring of the overfed dog at our feet.

"He'll give us ample notice by butting into Miss Barrison's skirts," I observed. "No need of our watching, professor."

The professor nodded. Presently he removed his spectacles and lay back against the bars, closing his eyes.

At first the forest silence seemed cheerful there in the flecked sunlight. The spotted wood-gnats gyrated merrily, chased by dragon-flies; the shy wood-birds hopped from branch to twig, peering at us in friendly inquiry; a lithe, gray squirrel, plumy tail undulating, rambled serenely around the cage, sniffing at the pastry within.

Suddenly, without apparent reason, the squirrel sprang to a tree-trunk, hung a moment on the bark, quivering all over, then dashed away into the jungle.

"Why did he act like that?" whispered Miss Barrison. And, after a moment: "How still it is! Where have the birds gone?"

In the ominous silence the dog began to whimper in his sleep and his hind legs kicked convulsively.

"He's dreaming—" I began.

The words were almost driven down my throat by the dog, who, without a yelp of warning, hurled himself at Miss Barrison and alighted on my chest, fore paws around my neck.

I cast him scornfully from me, but he scrambled back, digging like a mole to get under us.

"The transparent creatures!" whispered Miss Barrison. "Look! See that pie move!"

I sprang to my feet just as the professor, jamming on his spectacles, leaned forward and slammed the cage door.

"I've got one!" he shouted, frantically. "There's one in the cage! Turn on that hose!"

"Wait a second," said Miss Barrison, calmly, uncorking the bottle and pouring a pearly stream of rosium oxide into the tank. "Quick! It's fizzing! Screw on the top!"

In a second I had screwed the top fast, seized the hose, and directed a hissing cloud of vapor through the cage bars.

For a moment nothing was heard save the whistling rush of the perfumed spray escaping; a delicious odor of roses filled the air. Then, slowly, there in the sunshine, a misty something grew in the cage—a glistening, pearl-tinted phantom, imperceptibly taking shape in space—vague at first as a shred of lake vapor, then lengthening, rounding into flowing form, clearer, clearer.

"The Sphyx!" gasped the professor. "In the name of Heaven, play that hose!"

As he spoke the treacherous hose burst. A showery pillar of rose-colored vapor enveloped everything. Through the thickening fog for one brief instant a human form appeared like magic—a woman's form, flawless, exquisite as a statue, pure as marble. Then the swimming vapor buried it, cage, pies, and all.

We ran frantically around the cage in the obscurity, appealing for instructions and feeling for the bars. Once the professor's muffled voice was heard demanding the wearing apparel, and I groped about and found it and stuffed it through the bars of the cage.

"Do you need help?" I shouted. There was no response. Staring around through the thickening vapor of rosium rolling in clouds from the overturned tank, I heard Miss Barrison's voice calling:

"I can't move! A transparent lady is holding me!"

Blindly I rushed about, arms outstretched, and the next moment struck the door of the cage so hard that the impact almost knocked me senseless. Clutching it to steady myself, it suddenly flew open. A rush of partly visible creatures passed me like a burst of pink flames, and in the midst, borne swiftly away on the crest of the outrush, the professor passed like a bolt shot from a catapult; and his last cry came wafted back to me from the forest as I swayed there, drunk with the stupefying perfume: "Don't worry! I'm all right!"

I staggered out into the clearer air towards a figure seen dimly through swirling vapor.

"Are you hurt?" I stammered, clasping Miss Barrison in my arms.

"No—oh no," she said, wringing her hands. "But the professor! I saw him! I could not scream; I could not move! *They* had him!"

"I saw him too," I groaned. "There was not one trace of terror on his face. He was actually smiling."

Overcome at the sublime courage of the man, we wept in each other's arms.

* * *

True to our promise to Professor Farrago, we made the best of our way northward; and it was not a difficult journey by any means, the voyage in the launch across Okeechobee being perfectly simple and the trail to the nearest railroad station but a few easy miles from the landing-place.

Shocking as had been our experience, dreadful as was the calamity which had not only robbed me of a life-long friend, but had also bereaved the entire scientific world, I could not seem to feel that desperate and hopeless grief which the natural decease of a close friend might warrant. No; there remained a vague expectancy which so dominated my sorrow that at moments I became hopeful—nay, sanguine, that I should one day again behold my beloved superior in the flesh. There was something so happy in his last smile, something so artlessly pleased, that I was certain no fear of impending dissolution worried him as he disappeared into the uncharted depth of the unknown Everglades.

I think Miss Barrison agreed with me, too. She appeared to be more or less dazed, which was, of course, quite natural; and during our return voyage across Okeechobee and through the lagoons and forests beyond she was very silent.

When we reached the railroad at Portulacca, a thrifty lemon-growing ranch on the Volusia and Chinkapin Railway, the first thing I did was to present my dog to the station-agent—but I was obliged to give him five dollars before he consented to accept the dog.

However, Miss Barrison interviewed the station-master's wife, a kindly, pitiful soul, who promised to be a good mistress to the creature. We both felt better after that was off our minds; we felt better still when the north-bound train rolled leisurely into the white glare of Portulacca, and presently rolled out again, quite as leisurely, bound, thank Heaven, for that abused aggregation of sinful boroughs called New York.

Except for one young man whom I encountered in the smoker, we had the train to ourselves, a circumstance which, curiously enough, appeared to increase Miss Barrison's depression, and my own as a natural sequence. The circumstances of the taking off of Professor Farrago appeared to engross her thoughts so completely that it made me uneasy during our trip out from Little Sprite—in fact it was growing plainer to me every hour that in her brief acquaintance with that distinguished scientist she had become personally attached to him to an extent that began to worry me. Her personal indignation at the caged Sphyx flared out at unexpected intervals, and there could be no doubt that her unhappiness and resentment were becoming morbid.

I spent an hour or two in the smoking compartment, tenanted only by a single passenger and myself. He was an agreeable young man, although, in the natural acquaintanceship that we struck up, I regretted to learn that he was a writer of popular fiction, returning from Fort Worth, where he had been for the sole purpose of composing a poem on Florida.

I have always, in common with other mentally balanced savants, despised writers of fiction. All scientists harbor a natural antipathy to romance in any form, and that antipathy becomes a deep horror if fiction dares to deal flippantly with the exact sciences, or if some degraded intellect assumes the warrantless liberty of using natural history as the vehicle for silly tales.

Never but once had I been tempted to romance in any form; never but once had sentiment interfered with a passionless transfer of scientific notes to the sanctuary of the unvarnished note-book or the cloister of the juiceless monograph. Nor have I the slightest approach to that superficial and doubtful quality known as literary skill. Once, however, as I sat alone in the middle of the floor, classifying my isopods, I was not only astonished but totally unprepared to find myself repeating aloud a verse that I myself had unconsciously fashioned:

"An isopod
Is a work of God."

Never before in all my life had I made a rhyme; and it worried me for weeks, ringing in my brain day and night, confusing me, interfering with my thoughts.

I said as much to the young man, who only laughed good-naturedly and replied that it was the Creator's purpose to limit certain intellects, nobody knows why, and that it was apparent that mine had not escaped.

"There's one thing, however," he said, "that might be of some interest to you and come within the circumscribed scope of your intelligence."

"And what is that?" I asked, tartly.

"A scientific experience of mine," he said, with a careless laugh. "It's so much stranger than fiction that even Professor Bruce Stoddard, of Columbia, hesitated to credit it."

I looked at the young fellow suspiciously. His bland smile disarmed me, but I did not invite him to relate his experience, although he apparently needed only that encouragement to begin.

"Now, if I could tell it exactly as it occurred," he observed, "and a stenographer could take it down, word for word, exactly as I relate it—"

"It would give me great pleasure to do so," said a quiet voice at the door. We rose at once, removing the cigars from our lips; but Miss Barrison bade us continue smoking, and at a gesture from her we resumed our seats after she had installed herself by the window.

"Really," she said, looking coldly at me, "I couldn't endure the solitude any longer. Isn't there anything to do on this tiresome train?"

"If you had your pad and pencil," I began, maliciously, "you might take down a matter of interest—"

She looked frankly at the young man, who laughed in that pleasant, good-tempered manner of his, and offered to tell us of his alleged scientific experience if we thought it might amuse us sufficiently to vary the dull monotony of the journey north.

"Is it fiction?" I asked, point-blank.

"It is absolute truth," he replied.

I rose and went off to find pad and pencil. When I returned Miss Barrison was laughing at a story which the young man had just finished.

"But," he ended, gravely, "I have practically decided to renounce fiction as a means of livelihood and confine myself to simple, uninteresting statistics and facts."

"I am very glad to hear you say that," I exclaimed, warmly. He bowed, looked at Miss Barrison, and asked her when he might begin his story.

"Whenever you are ready," replied Miss Barrison, smiling in a manner which I had not observed since the disappearance of Professor Farrago. I'll admit that the young fellow was superficially attractive.

"Well, then," he began, modestly, "having no technical ability concerning the affair in question, and having no knowledge of either comparative anatomy or zoology, I am perhaps unfitted to tell this story. But the story is true; the episode occurred under my own eyes—within a few hours' sail of the *Battery*. And as I was one of the first persons to verify what has long been a theory among scientists, and, moreover, as the result of Professor Holroyd's discovery is to be placed on exhibition in Madison Square Garden on the 20th of next month, I have decided to tell you, as simply as I am able, exactly what occurred.

"I first told the story on April 1, 1903, to the editors of the *North American Review, The Popular Science Monthly,* the *Scientific American, Nature. Outing,* and the *Fossiliferous Magazine.* All these gentlemen rejected it; some curtly informing me that fiction had no place in their columns. When I attempted to explain that it was not fiction, the editors of these periodicals either maintained a contemptuous silence, or bluntly notified me that my literary services and opinions were not desired. But finally, when several publishers offered to take the story as fiction, I cut short all negotiations and decided to publish it myself. Where I am known at all, it is my misfortune to be known as a writer of fiction. This makes it impossible for me to receive a hearing from a scientific audience. I regret it bitterly, because, now, when it is too late, I am prepared to prove certain scientific matters of interest, and to produce the proofs. In this case, however, I am fortunate, for nobody can dispute the existence of a thing when the bodily proof is exhibited as evidence.

"This is the story; and if I tell it as I write fiction, it is because I do not know how to tell it otherwise.

"I was walking along the beach below Pine Inlet, on the south shore of Long Island. The railroad and telegraph station is at West Oyster Bay. Everybody who has travelled on the Long Island Railroad knows the station, but few, perhaps, know Pine Inlet. Duck-shooters, of course, are familiar with it; but as there are no hotels there, and nothing to see except salt meadow, salt creek, and a strip of dune and sand, the summer-squatting public may probably be unaware of its existence. The local name for the place is Pine Inlet; the maps give its name as Sand Point, I believe, but anybody at West Oyster Bay can direct you to it. Captain McPeek, who keeps the West Oyster Bay House, drives duck-shooters there in winter. It lies five miles southeast from West Oyster Bay.

"I had walked over that afternoon from Captain McPeek's. There was a reason for my going to Pine Inlet—it embarrasses me to explain it, but the truth is I meditated writing an ode to the ocean. It was out of the question to write it in West Oyster Bay, with the whistle of locomotives in my ears. I knew that Pine Inlet was one of the loneliest places on the Atlantic coast; it is out of sight of everything except leagues of gray ocean. Rarely one might make out fishing-smacks drifting across the horizon. Summer squatters never visited it; sportsmen shunned it, except in winter. Therefore, as I was about to do a bit of poetry, I thought that Pine Inlet was the spot for the deed. So I went there.

"As I was strolling along the beach, biting my pencil reflectively, tremendously impressed by the solitude and the solemn thunder of the surf, a thought occurred to me—how unpleasant it would be if I suddenly stumbled on a summer boarder. As this joyless impossibility flitted across my mind, I rounded a bleak sand-dune.

"A girl stood directly in my path.

"She stared at me as though I had just crawled up out of the sea to bite her. I don't know what my own expression resembled, but I have been given to understand it was idiotic.

"Now I perceived, after a few moments, that the young lady was frightened, and I knew I ought to say something civil. So I said, 'Are there many mosquitoes here?'

"'No,' she replied, with a slight quiver in her voice; 'I have only seen one, and it was biting somebody else.'

"The conversation seemed so futile, and the young lady appeared to be more nervous than before. I had an impulse to say, 'Do not run; I have breakfasted,' for she seemed to be meditating a flight into the breakers. What I did say was: 'I did not know anybody was here. I do not intend to intrude. I come from Captain McPeek's, and I am writing an ode to the ocean.' After I had said this it seemed to ring in my ears like, 'I come from Table Mountain, and my name is Truthful James.'

"I glanced timidly at her.

"'She's thinking of the same thing,' said I to myself.

"However, the young lady seemed to be a trifle reassured. I noticed she drew a sigh of relief and looked at my shoes. She looked so long that it made me suspicious, and I also examined my shoes. They seemed to be in a fair state of repair.

"'I—I am sorry,' she said, 'but would you mind not walking on the beach?'

"This was sudden. I had intended to retire and leave the beach to her, but I did not fancy being driven away so abruptly.

"'Dear me!' she cried; 'you don't understand. I do not—I would not think for a moment of asking you to leave Pine Inlet. I merely ventured to request you to walk on the dunes. I am so afraid that your footprints may obliterate the impressions that my father is studying.'

"'Oh!' said I, looking about me as though I had been caught in the middle of a flower-bed; 'really I did not notice any impressions. Impressions of what?'

"'I don't know,' she said, smiling a little at my awkward pose. 'If you step this way in a straight line you can do no damage.'

"I did as she bade me. I suppose my movements resembled the gait of a wet peacock. Possibly they recalled the delicate manoeuvres of the kangaroo. Anyway, she laughed.

"This seriously annoyed me. I had been at a disadvantage; I walk well enough when let alone.

"'You can scarcely expect,' said I, 'that a man absorbed in his own ideas could notice impressions on the sand. I trust I have obliterated nothing.'

"As I said this I looked back at the long line of footprints stretching away in prospective across the sand. They were my own. How large they looked! Was that what she was laughing at?

"'I wish to explain," she said, gravely, looking at the point of her parasol. 'I am very sorry to be obliged to warn you—to ask you to forego the pleasure of strolling on a beach that does not belong to me. Perhaps,' she continued, in sudden alarm, 'perhaps this beach belongs to you?'

"'The beach? Oh no,' I said.

"'But—but you were going to write poems about it?'

"'Only one—and that does not necessitate owning the beach. I have observed,' said I, frankly, 'that the people who own nothing write many poems about it.'

"She looked at me seriously.

"'I write many poems,' I added.

"She laughed doubtfully.

"'Would you rather I went away?' I asked, politely. 'My family is respectable,' I added; and I told her my name.

"'Oh! Then you wrote *Culled Cowslips* and *Faded Fig-Leaves* and you imitate Maeterlinck, and you— Oh, I know lots of people that you know;' she cried, with every symptom of relief; 'and you know my brother.'

"'I am the author,' said I, coldly, 'of *Culled Cowslips*, but *Faded Fig-Leaves* was an earlier work, which I no longer recognize, and I should be grateful to you if you would be kind enough to deny that I ever imitated Maeterlinck. Possibly,' I added, 'he imitates me.'

"She was very quiet, and I saw she was sorry.

"'Never mind,' I said, magnanimously, 'you probably are not familiar with modern literature. If I knew your name I should ask permission to present myself.'

"'Why, I am Daisy Holroyd,' she said.

"'What! Jack Holroyd's little sister?'

"'Little?' she cried.

"'I didn't mean that," said I. 'You know that your brother and I were great friends in Paris—'

"'I know,' she said, significantly.

"'Ahem! Of course,' I said, 'Jack and I were inseparable—'

"'Except when shut in separate cells,' said Miss Holroyd, coldly.

"This unfeeling allusion to the unfortunate termination of a Latin-Quarter celebration hurt me.

"'The police,' said I, 'were too officious.'

"'So Jack says,' replied Miss Holroyd, demurely.

"We had unconsciously moved on along the sand-hills, side by side, as we spoke.

"'To think,' I repeated, 'that I should meet Jack's little—'

"'Please,' she said, 'you are only three years my senior.'

"She opened the sunshade and tipped it over one shoulder. It was white, and had spots and posies on it.

"'Jack sends us every new book you write,' she observed. 'I do not approve of some things you write.'

"'Modern school,' I mumbled.

"'That is no excuse,' She said, severely; 'Anthony Trollope didn't do it.'

"The foam spume from the breakers was drifting across the dunes, and the little tip-up snipe ran along the beach and teetered and whistled and spread their white-barred wings for a low, straight flight across the shingle, only to tip and run and sail on again. The salt sea-wind whistled and curled through the crested waves, blowing in perfumed puffs across thickets of sweet bay and cedar. As we passed through the crackling juicy-stemmed marsh-weed myriads of fiddler crabs raised their fore-claws in warning and backed away, rustling, through the reeds, aggressive, protesting.

"'Like millions of pygmy Ajaxes defying the lightning,' I said.

"Miss Holroyd laughed.

"'Now I never imagined that authors were clever except in print,' she said.

"She was a most extraordinary girl.

"'I suppose,' she observed, after a moment's silence—'I suppose I am taking you to my father.'

"'Delighted!' I mumbled. 'H'm! I had the honor of meeting Professor Holroyd in Paris.'

"'Yes; he bailed you and Jack out,' said Miss Holroyd, serenely.

"The silence was too painful to last.

"'Captain McPeek is an interesting man,' I said. I spoke more loudly than I intended. I may have been nervous.

"'Yes,' said Daisy Holroyd, 'but he has a most singular hotel clerk.'

"'You mean Mr. Frisby?'

"'I do.'

"'Yes," I admitted, 'Mr. Frisby is queer. He was once a bill-poster.'

"'I know it!' exclaimed Daisy Holroyd, with some heat. 'He ruins landscapes whenever he has an opportunity. Do you know that he has a passion for bill-posting? He has; he posts bills for the pure pleasure of it, just as you play golf, or tennis, or squash.'

"'But he's a hotel clerk now,' I said; 'nobody employs him to post bills.'

"'I know it! He does it all by himself for the pure pleasure of it. Papa has engaged him to come down here for two weeks, and I dread it,' said the girl.

"What Professor Holroyd might want of Frisby I had not the faintest notion. I suppose Miss Holroyd noticed the bewilderment in my face, for she laughed and nodded her head twice.

"'Not only Mr. Frisby, but Captain McPeek also,' she said.

"'You don't mean to say that Captain McPeek is going to close his hotel!' I exclaimed.

"My trunk was there. It contained guarantees of my respectability.

"'Oh no; his wife will keep it open,' replied the girl. 'Look! you can see papa now. He's digging.'

"'Where?' I blurted out.

"I remembered Professor Holroyd as a prim, spectacled gentleman, with close-cut, snowy beard and a clerical allure. The man I saw digging wore green goggles, a jersey, a battered sou'wester, and hip-boots of rubber. He was delving in the muck of the salt meadow, his face streaming with perspiration, his boots and jersey splashed with unpleasant-looking mud. He glanced up as we approached, shading his eyes with a sunburned hand.

"'Papa, dear,' said Miss Holroyd, 'here is Jack's friend, whom you bailed out of Mazas.'

"The introduction was startling. I turned crimson with mortification. The professor was very decent about it; he called me by name at once. Then he looked at his spade. It was clear he considered me a nuisance and wished to go on with his digging.

"'I suppose,' he said, 'you are still writing?'

"'A little,' I replied, trying not to speak sarcastically. My output had rivalled that of 'The Duchess'—in quantity, I mean.

"'I seldom read—fiction,' he said, looking restlessly at the hole in the ground.

"Miss Holroyd came to my rescue.

"'That was a charming story you wrote last,' she said. 'Papa should read it—you should, papa; it's all about a fossil.'

"We both looked narrowly at Miss Holroyd. Her smile was guileless.

"'Fossils!' repeated the professor. 'Do you care for fossils?'

"'Very much,' said I.

"Now I am not perfectly sure what my object was in lying. I looked at Daisy Holroyd's dark-fringed eyes. They were very grave.

"'Fossils,' said I, 'are my hobby.'

"I think Miss Holroyd winced a little at this. I did not care. I went on:

"'I have seldom had the opportunity to study the subject, but, as a boy, I collected flint arrow-heads—'

"'Flint arrow-heads!' said the professor coldly.

"'Yes; they were the nearest things to fossils obtainable,' I replied, marvelling at my own mendacity.

"The professor looked into the hole. I also looked. I could see nothing in it. 'He's digging for fossils,' thought I to myself.

"'Perhaps,' said the professor, cautiously, 'you might wish to aid me in a little research—that is to say, if you have an inclination for fossils.' The double-entendre was not lost upon me.

"'I have read all your books so eagerly,' said I, 'that to join you, to be of service to you in any research, however difficult and trying, would be an honor and a privilege that I never dared to hope for.'

"'That,' thought I to myself, 'will do its own work.'

"But the professor was still suspicious. How could he help it, when he remembered Jack's escapades, in which my name was always blended! Doubtless he was satisfied that my influence on Jack was evil. The contrary was the case, too.

"'Fossils,' he said, worrying the edge of the excavation with his spade—'fossils are not things to be lightly considered.'

"'No, indeed!' I protested.

"'Fossils are the most interesting as well as puzzling things in the world,' said he.

"'They are!' I cried, enthusiastically.

"'But I am not looking for fossils,' observed the professor, mildly.

"This was a facer. I looked at Daisy Holroyd. She bit her lip and fixed her eyes on the sea. Her eyes were wonderful eyes.

"'Did you think I was digging for fossils in a salt meadow?' queried the professor. 'You can have read very little about the subject. I am digging for something quite different.'

"I was silent. I knew that my face was flushed. I longed to say, 'Well, what the devil are you digging for?' but I only stared into the hole as though hypnotized.

"'Captain McPeek and Frisby ought to be here,' he said, looking first at Daisy and then across the meadows.

"I ached to ask him why he had subpoenaed Captain McPeek and Frisby.

"'They are coming,' said Daisy, shading her eyes. 'Do you see the speck on the meadows?'

"'It may be a mud-hen,' said the professor.

"'Miss Holroyd is right,' I said. 'A wagon and team and two men are coming from the north. There's a dog beside the wagon—it's that miserable yellow dog of Frisby's.'

"'Good gracious!' cried the professor, 'you don't mean to tell me that you see all that at such a distance?'

"'Why not?' I said.

"'I see nothing,' he insisted.

"'You will see that I'm right, presently,' I laughed.

"The professor removed his blue goggles and rubbed them, glancing obliquely at me.

"'Haven't you heard what extraordinary eyesight duck-shooters have?' said his daughter, looking back at her father. 'Jack says that he can tell exactly what kind of a duck is flying before most people could see anything at all in the sky.'

"'It's true,' I said; 'it comes to anybody, I fancy, who has had practice.'

"The professor regarded me with a new interest. There was inspiration in his eyes. He turned towards the ocean. For a long time he stared at the tossing waves on the beach, then he looked far out to where the horizon met the sea.

"'Are there any ducks out there?' he asked, at last.

"'Yes,' said I, scanning the sea, 'there are.'

"He produced a pair of binoculars from his coat-tail pocket, adjusted them, and raised them to his eyes.

"'H'm! What sort of ducks?'

"I looked more carefully, holding both hands over my forehead.

"'Surf-ducks and widgeon. There is one bufflehead among them—no, two; the rest are coots,' I replied.

"'This,' cried the professor, 'is most astonishing. I have good eyes, but I can't see a blessed thing without these binoculars!'

"'It's not extraordinary,' said I; 'the surf-ducks and coots any novice might recognize; the widgeon and buffleheads I should not have been able to name unless they had risen from the water. It is easy to tell any duck when it is flying, even though it looks no bigger than a black pin-point.'

"But the professor insisted that it was marvellous, and he said that I might render him invaluable service if I would consent to come and camp at Pine Inlet for a few weeks.

"I looked at his daughter, but she turned her back. Her back was beautifully moulded. Her gown fitted also.

"'Camp out here?' I repeated, pretending to be unpleasantly surprised.

"'I do not think he would care to,' said Miss Holroyd, without turning.

"I had not expected that.

"'Above all things,' said I, in a clear, pleasant voice, 'I like to camp out.'

"She said nothing.

"'It is not exactly camping,' said the professor. 'Come, you shall see our conservatory. Daisy, come, dear! You must put on a heavier frock; it is getting towards sundown.'

"At that moment, over a near dune, two horses' heads appeared, followed by two human heads, then a wagon, then a yellow dog.

"I turned triumphantly to the professor.

"'You are the very man I want,' he muttered—'the very man—the very man.'

"I looked at Daisy Holroyd. She returned my glance with a defiant little smile.

"'Waal,' said Captain McPeek, driving up, 'here we be! Git out, Frisby.'

"Frisby, fat, nervous, and sentimental, hopped out of the cart.

"'Come,' said the professor, impatiently moving across the dunes. I walked with Daisy Holroyd. McPeek and Frisby followed. The yellow dog walked by himself."

XVIII

The sun was dipping into the sea as we trudged across the meadows towards a high, dome-shaped dune covered with cedars and thickets of sweet bay. I saw no sign of habitation among the sand-hills. Far as the eye could reach, nothing broke the gray line of sea and sky save the squat dunes crowned with stunted cedars.

"Then, as we rounded the base of the dune, we almost walked into the door of a house. My amazement amused Miss Holroyd, and I noticed also a touch of malice in her pretty eyes. But she said nothing, following her father into the house, with the slightest possible gesture to me. Was it invitation or was it menace?

"The house was merely a light wooden frame, covered with some waterproof stuff that looked like a mixture of rubber and tar. Over this—in fact, over the whole roof—was pitched an awning of heavy sail-cloth. I noticed that the house was anchored to the sand by chains, already rusted red. But this one-storied house was not the only building nestling in the south shelter of the big dune. A hundred feet away stood another structure—long, low, also built of wood. It had rows on rows of round port-holes on every side. The ports were fitted with heavy glass, hinged to swing open if necessary. A single, big double door occupied the front.

"Behind this long, low building was still another, a mere shed. Smoke rose from the sheet-iron chimney. There was somebody moving about inside the open door.

"As I stood gaping at this mushroom hamlet the professor appeared at the door and asked me to enter. I stepped in at once.

"The house was much larger than I had imagined. A straight hallway ran through the centre from east to west. On either side of this hallway were rooms, the doors swinging wide open. I counted three doors on each side; the three on the south appeared to be bedrooms.

"The professor ushered me into a room on the north side, where I found Captain McPeek and Frisby sitting at a table, upon which were drawings and sketches of articulated animals and fishes.

"'You see, McPeek,' said the professor, 'we only wanted one more man, and I think I've got him—Haven't I?' turning eagerly to me.

"'Why, yes,' I said, laughing; 'this is delightful. Am I invited to stay here?'

"'Your bedroom is the third on the south side; everything is ready. McPeek, you can bring his trunk tomorrow, can't you?' demanded the professor.

"The red-faced captain nodded, and shifted a quid.

"'Then it's all settled,' said the professor, and he drew a sigh of satisfaction. 'You see,' he said, turning to me, 'I was at my wit's end to know whom to trust. I never thought of you. Jack's out in China, and I didn't dare trust anybody in my own profession. All you care about is writing verses and stories, isn't it?'

"'I like to shoot,' I replied, mildly.

"'Just the thing!' he cried, beaming at us all in turn. 'Now I can see no reason why we should not progress rapidly. McPeek, you and Frisby must get those boxes up here before dark. Dinner will be ready before you have finished unloading. Dick, you will wish to go to your room first.'

"My name isn't Dick, but he spoke so kindly, and beamed upon me in such a fatherly manner, that I let it go. I had occasion to correct him afterwards, several times, but he always forgot the next minute. He calls me Dick to this day.

"It was dark when Professor Holroyd, his daughter, and I sat down to dinner. The room was the same in which I had noticed the drawings of beast and bird, but the round table had been extended into an oval, and neatly spread with dainty linen and silver.

"A fresh-cheeked Swedish girl appeared from a farther room, bearing the soup. The professor ladled it out, still beaming.

"'Now, this is very delightful—isn't it, Daisy?' he said.

"'Very,' said Miss Holroyd, with a tinge of irony.

"'Very,' I repeated, heartily.

"'I suppose,' said the professor, nodding mysteriously at his daughter, 'that Dick knows nothing of what we're about down here?'

"'I suppose,' said Miss Holroyd, 'that he thinks we are digging for fossils.'

"I looked at my plate. She might have spared me that.

"'Well, well,' said her father, smiling to himself, 'he shall know everything by morning. You'll be astonished, Dick, my boy.'

"'His name isn't Dick,' corrected Daisy.

"The professor said, 'Isn't it?' in an absent-minded way, and relapsed into contemplation of my necktie.

"I asked Miss Holroyd a few questions about Jack, and was informed that he had given up law and entered the consular service—as what, I did not dare ask, for I know what our consular service is.

"'In China,' said Daisy.

"'Choo Choo is the name of the city,' added her father, proudly; 'it's the terminus of the new trans-Siberian railway.'

"'It's on the Pong Ping,' said Daisy.

"'He's vice-consul,' added the professor, triumphantly.

"'He'll make a good one,' I observed. I knew Jack. I pitied his consul.

"So we chatted on about my old playmate, until Freda, the red-cheeked maid, brought coffee, and the professor lighted a cigar, with a little bow to his daughter.

"'Of course, you don't smoke,' she said to me, with a glimmer of malice in her eyes.

"'He mustn't,' interposed the professor, hastily; 'it will make his hand tremble.'

"'No, it won't,' said I, laughing; 'but my hand will shake if I don't smoke. Are you going to employ me as a draughtsman?'

"'You'll know to-morrow,' he chuckled, with a mysterious smile at his daughter. 'Daisy, give him my best cigars—put the box here on the table. We can't afford to have his hand tremble.'

"Miss Holroyd rose and crossed the hallway to her father's room, returning presently with a box of promising-looking cigars.

"'I don't think he knows what is good for him,' she said. 'He should smoke only one every day.'

"It was hard to bear. I am not vindictive, but I decided to treasure up a few of Miss Holroyd's gentle taunts. My intimacy with her brother was certainly a disadvantage to me now. Jack had apparently been talking too much, and his sister appeared to be thoroughly acquainted with my past. It was a disadvantage. I remembered her vaguely as a girl with long braids, who used to come on Sundays with her father and take tea with us in our rooms. Then she went to Germany to school, and Jack and I employed our Sunday evenings otherwise. It is true that I regarded her weekly visits as a species of infliction, but I did not think I ever showed it.

"'It is strange,' said I, 'that you did not recognize me at once, Miss Holroyd. Have I changed so greatly in five years?'

"'You wore a pointed French beard in Paris,' she said—'a very downy one. And you never stayed to tea but twice, and then you only spoke once.'

"'Oh!' said I, blankly. 'What did I say?'

"'You asked me if I liked plums,' said Daisy, bursting into an irresistible ripple of laughter.

"I saw that I must have made the same sort of an ass of myself that most boys of eighteen do.

"It was too bad. I never thought about the future in those days. Who could have imagined that little Daisy Holroyd would have grown up into this bewildering young lady? It was really too bad. Presently the professor retired to his room, carrying with him an armful of drawings, and bidding us not to sit up late. When he closed his door Miss Holroyd turned to me.

"'Papa will work over those drawings until midnight,' she said, with a despairing smile.

"'It isn't good for him,' I said. 'What are the drawings?'

"'You may know to-morrow,' she answered, leaning forward on the table and shading her face with one hand. 'Tell me about yourself and Jack in Paris.'

"I looked at her suspiciously.

"'What! There isn't much to tell. We studied. Jack went to the law school, and I attended—er—oh, all sorts of schools.'

"'Did you? Surely you gave yourself a little recreation occasionally?'

"'Occasionally,' I nodded.

"'I am afraid you and Jack studied too hard.'

"'That may be,' said I, looking meek.

"'Especially about fossils.'

"I couldn't stand that.

"'Miss Holroyd,' I said, 'I do care for fossils. You may think that I am a humbug, but I have a perfect mania for fossils—now.'

"'Since when?'

"'About an hour ago,' I said, airily. Out of the corner of my eye I saw that she had flushed up. It pleased me.

"'You will soon tire of the experiment,' she said, with a dangerous smile.

"'Oh, I may,' I replied, indifferently.

"She drew back. The movement was scarcely perceptible, but I noticed it, and she knew I did.

"The atmosphere was vaguely hostile. One feels such mental conditions and changes instantly. I picked up a chess-board, opened it, set up the pieces with elaborate care, and began to move, first the white, then the black. Miss Holroyd watched me coldly at first, but after a dozen moves she became interested and leaned a shade nearer. I moved a black pawn forward.

"'Why do you do that?' said Daisy.

"'Because,' said I, 'the white queen threatens the pawn.'

"'It was an aggressive move,' she insisted.

"'Purely defensive,' I said. 'If her white highness will let the pawn alone, the pawn will let the queen alone.'

"Miss Holroyd rested her chin on her wrist and gazed steadily at the board. She was flushing furiously, but she held her ground.

"'If the white queen doesn't block that pawn, the pawn may become dangerous,' she said, coldly.

"I laughed, and closed up the board with a snap.

"'True,' I said, 'it might even take the queen.' After a moment's silence I asked, 'What would you do in that case, Miss Holroyd?'

"'I should resign,' she said, serenely; then, realizing what she had said, she lost her self-possession for a second, and cried: 'No, indeed! I should fight to the bitter end! I mean—'

"'What?' I asked, lingering over my revenge.

"'I mean,' she said, slowly, 'that your black pawn would never have the chance—never! I should take it immediately.'

"'I believe you would,' said I, smiling; 'so we'll call the game yours, and—the pawn captured.'

"'I don't want it,' she exclaimed. 'A pawn is worthless.'

"'Except when it's in the king row.'

"'Chess is most interesting,' she observed, sedately. She had completely recovered her self-possession. Still I saw that she now had a certain respect for my defensive powers. It was very soothing to me.

"'You know,' said I, gravely, 'that I am fonder of Jack than of anybody. That's the reason we never write each other, except to borrow things. I am afraid that when I was a young cub in France I was not an attractive personality.'

"'On the contrary,' said Daisy, smiling, 'I thought you were very big and very perfect. I had illusions. I wept often when I went home and remembered that you never took the trouble to speak to me but once.'

"'I was a cub,' I said—'not selfish and brutal, but I didn't understand school-girls. I never had any sisters, and I didn't know what to say to very young girls. If I had imagined that you felt hurt—'

"'Oh, I did—five years ago. Afterwards I laughed at the whole thing.'

"'Laughed?' I repeated, vaguely disappointed.

"'Why, of course. I was very easily hurt when I was a child. I think I have outgrown it.'

"The soft curve of her sensitive mouth contradicted her.

"'Will you forgive me now?' I asked.

"'Yes. I had forgotten the whole thing until I met you an hour or so ago.'

"There was something that had a ring not entirely genuine in this speech. I noticed it, but forgot it the next moment.

"Presently she rose, touched her hair with the tip of one finger, and walked to the door.

"'Good-night,' she said.

"'Good-night,' said I, opening the door for her to pass.

XIX

The sea was a sheet of silver tinged with pink. The tremendous arch of the sky was all shimmering and glimmering with the promise of the sun. Already the mist above, flecked with clustered clouds, flushed with rose color and dull gold. I heard the low splash of the waves breaking and curling across the beach. A wandering breeze, fresh and fragrant, blew the curtains of my window. There was the scent of sweet bay in the room, and everywhere the subtle, nameless perfume of the sea.

"When at last I stood upon the shore, the air and sea were all a-glimmer in a rosy light, deepening to crimson in the zenith. Along the beach I saw a little cove, shelving and all a-shine, where shallow waves washed with a mellow sound. Fine as dusted gold the shingle glowed, and the thin film of water rose, receded, crept up again a little higher, and again flowed back, with the low hiss of snowy foam and gilded bubbles breaking.

"I stood a little while quiet, my eyes upon the water, the invitation of the ocean in my ears, vague and sweet as the murmur of a shell. Then I looked at my bathing-suit and towels.

"'In we go!' said I, aloud. A second later the prophecy was fulfilled.

"I swam far out to sea, and as I swam the waters all around me turned to gold. The sun had risen.

"There is a fragrance in the sea at dawn that none can name. Whitethorn a-bloom in May, sedges a-sway, and scented rushes rustling in an inland wind recall the sea to me—I can't say why.

"Far out at sea I raised myself, swung around, dived, and set out again for shore, striking strong strokes until the flecked foam flew. And when at last I shot through the breakers, I laughed aloud and sprang upon the beach, breathless and happy. Then from the ocean came another cry, clear, joyous, and a white arm rose in the air.

"She came drifting in with the waves like a white sea-sprite, laughing at me, and I plunged into the breakers again to join her.

"Side by side we swam along the coast, just outside the breakers, until in the next cove we saw the flutter of her maid's cap-strings.

"'I will beat you to breakfast!' she cried, as I rested, watching her glide up along the beach.

"'Done!' said I—'for a sea-shell!'

"'Done!' she called, across the water.

"I made good speed along the shore, and I was not long in dressing, but when I entered the dining-room she was there, demure, smiling, exquisite in her cool, white frock.

"'The sea-shell is yours,' said I. 'I hope I can find one with a pearl in it.'

"The professor hurried in before she could reply. He greeted me very cordially, but there was an abstracted air about him, and he called me Dick until I recognized that remonstrance was useless. He was not long over his coffee and rolls.

"'McPeek and Frisby will return with the last load, including your trunk, by early afternoon,' he said, rising and picking up his bundle of drawings. 'I haven't time to explain to you what we are doing, Dick, but Daisy will take you about and instruct you. She will give you the rifle standing in my room—it's a good Winchester. I have sent for an 'Express' for you, big enough to knock over any elephant in India. Daisy, take him through the sheds and tell him everything. Luncheon is at noon. Do you usually take luncheon, Dick?'

"'When I am permitted,' I smiled.

"'Well,' said the professor, doubtfully, 'you mustn't come back here for it. Freda can take you what you want. Is your hand unsteady after eating?'

"'Why, papa!' said Daisy. 'Do you intend to starve him?'

"We all laughed.

"The professor tucked his drawings into a capacious pocket, pulled his sea-boots up to his hips, seized a spade, and left, nodding to us as though he were thinking of something else.

"We went to the door and watched him across the salt meadows until the distant sand-dune hid him.

"'Come,' said Daisy Holroyd. 'I am going to take you to the shop.'

"She put on a broad-brimmed straw hat, a distractingly pretty combination of filmy cool stuffs, and led the way to the long, low structure that I had noticed the evening before.

"The interior was lighted by the numberless little port-holes, and I could see everything plainly. I acknowledge I was nonplussed by what I did see.

"In the centre of the shed, which must have been at least a hundred feet long, stood what I thought at first was the skeleton of an enormous whale. After a moment's silent contemplation of the thing I saw that it could not be a whale, for the frames of two gigantic, bat-like wings rose from each shoulder. Also I noticed that the animal possessed legs—four of them—with most unpleasant-looking webbed claws fully eight feet long. The bony framework of the head, too, resembled something between a crocodile and a monstrous snapping-turtle. The walls of the shanty were hung with drawings and blue prints. A man dressed in white linen was tinkering with the vertebrae of the lizard-like tail.

"'Where on earth did such a reptile come from?' I asked at length.

"'Oh, it's not real!' said Daisy, scornfully; 'it's papier-maché.'

"'I see,' said I; 'a stage prop.'

"'A what?' asked Daisy, in hurt astonishment.

"'Why, a—a sort of Siegfried dragon—a what's-his-name—er, Pfafner, or Peffer, or—'

"'If my father heard you say such things he would dislike you,' said Daisy. She looked grieved, and moved towards the door. I apologized—for what, I knew not—and we became reconciled. She ran into her father's room and brought me the rifle, a very good Winchester. She also gave me a cartridge-belt, full.

"'Now,' she smiled, 'I shall take you to your observatory, and when we arrive you are to begin your duty at once.'

"'And that duty?' I ventured, shouldering the rifle.

"'That duty is to watch the ocean. I shall then explain the whole affair—but you mustn't look at me while I speak; you must watch the sea.'

"'This,' said I, 'is hardship. I had rather go without the luncheon.'

"I do not think she was offended at my speech; still she frowned for almost three seconds.

"We passed through acres of sweet bay and spear grass, sometimes skirting thickets of twisted cedars, sometimes walking in the full glare of the morning sun, sinking into shifting sand where sun-scorched shells crackled under our feet, and sun-browned sea-weed glistened, bronzed and iridescent. Then, as we climbed a little hill, the sea-wind freshened in our faces, and lo! the ocean lay below us, far-stretching as the eye could reach, glittering, magnificent.

"Daisy sat down flat on the sand. It takes a clever girl to do that and retain the respectful deference due her from men. It takes a graceful girl to accomplish it triumphantly when a man is looking.

"'You must sit beside me,' she said—as though it would prove irksome to me.

"'Now,' she continued, 'you must watch the water while I am talking.'

"I nodded.

"'Why don't you do it, then?' she asked.

"I succeeded in wrenching my head towards the ocean, although I felt sure it would swing gradually round again in spite of me.

"'To begin with,' said Daisy Holroyd, 'there's a thing in that ocean that would astonish you if you saw it. Turn your head!'

"'I am,' I said, meekly.

"'Did you hear what I said?'

"'Yes—er—a thing in the ocean that's going to astonish me.' Visions of mermaids rose before me.

"'The thing,' said Daisy, 'is a thermosaurus!'

"I nodded vaguely, as though anticipating a delightful introduction to a nautical friend.

"'You don't seem astonished,' she said, reproachfully.

"'Why should I be?' I asked.

"'Please turn your eyes towards the water. Suppose a thermosaurus should look out of the waves!'

"'Well,' said I, 'in that case the pleasure would be mutual.'

"She frowned and bit her upper lip.

"'Do you know what a thermosaurus is?' she asked.

"'If I am to guess,' said I, 'I guess it's a jelly-fish.'

"'It's that big, ugly, horrible creature that I showed you in the shed!' cried Daisy, impatiently.

"'Eh!' I stammered.

"'Not papier-maché, either,' she continued, excitedly; 'it's a real one.'

"This was pleasant news. I glanced instinctively at my rifle and then at the ocean.

"'Well,' said I at last, 'it strikes me that you and I resemble a pair of Andromedas waiting to be swallowed. This rifle won't stop a beast, a live beast, like that Nibelungen dragon of yours.'

"'Yes, it will,' she said; 'it's not an ordinary rifle.'

"Then, for the first time, I noticed, just below the magazine, a cylindrical attachment that was strange to me.

"'Now, if you will watch the sea very carefully, and will promise not to look at me,' said Daisy, 'I will try to explain.'

"She did not wait for me to promise, but went on eagerly, a sparkle of excitement in her blue eyes:

"'You know, of all the fossil remains of the great bat-like and lizard-like creatures that inhabited the earth ages and ages ago, the bones of the gigantic saurians are the most interesting. I think they used to splash about the water and fly over the land during the carboniferous period; anyway, it doesn't matter. Of course you have seen pictures of reconstructed creatures such as the ichthyosaurus, the plesiosaurus, the anthracosaurus, and the thermosaurus?'

"I nodded, trying to keep my eyes from hers.

"'And you know that the remains of the thermosaurus were first discovered and reconstructed by papa?'

"'Yes,' said I. There was no use in saying no.

"'I am glad you do. Now, papa has proved that this creature lived entirely in the Gulf Stream, emerging for occasional flights across an ocean or two. Can you imagine how he proved it?'

"'No,' said I, resolutely pointing my nose at the ocean.

"'He proved it by a minute examination of the microscopical shells found among the ribs of the thermosaurus. These shells contained little creatures that live only in the warm waters of the Gulf Stream. They were the food of the thermosaurus.'

"'It was rather slender rations for a thing like that, wasn't it? Did he ever swallow bigger food—er—men?'

"'Oh yes. Tons of fossil bones from prehistoric men are also found in the interior of the thermosaurus.'

"'Then,' said I, 'you, at least, had better go back to Captain McPeek's—'

"'Please turn around; don't be so foolish. I didn't say there was a live thermosaurus in the water, did I?'

"'Isn't there?'

"'Why, no!'

"My relief was genuine, but I thought of the rifle and looked suspiciously out to sea.

"'What's the Winchester for?' I asked.

"'Listen, and I will explain. Papa has found out—how, I do not exactly understand—that there is in the waters of the Gulf Stream the body of a thermosaurus. The creature must have been alive within a year or so. The impenetrable scale-armor that covers its body has, as far as papa knows, prevented its disintegration. We know that it is there still, or was there within a few months. Papa has reports and sworn depositions from steamer captains and seamen from a dozen different vessels, all corroborating one another in essential details.

These stories, of course, get into the newspapers—sea-serpent stories—but papa knows that they confirm his theory that the huge body of this reptile is swinging along somewhere in the Gulf Stream.'

"She opened her sunshade and held it over her. I noticed that she deigned to give me the benefit of about one-eighth of it.

"'Your duty with that rifle is this: if we are fortunate enough to see the body of the thermosaurus come floating by, you are to take good aim and fire—fire rapidly every bullet in the magazine; then reload and fire again, and reload and fire as long as you have any cartridges left.'

"'A self-feeding Maxim is what I should have,' I said, with gentle sarcasm. 'Well, and suppose I make a sieve of this big lizard?'

"'Do you see these rings in the sand?' she asked.

"Sure enough, somebody had driven heavy piles deep into the sand all around us, and to the tops of these piles were attached steel rings, half buried under the spear-grass. We sat almost exactly in the centre of a circle of these rings.

"'The reason is this,' said Daisy; 'every bullet in your cartridges is steel-tipped and armor-piercing. To the base of each bullet is attached a thin wire of pallium. Pallium is that new metal, a thread of which, drawn out into finest wire, will hold a ton of iron suspended. Every bullet is fitted with minute coils of miles of this wire. When the bullet leaves the rifle it spins out this wire as a shot from a life-saver's mortar spins out and carries the life-line to a wrecked ship. The end of each coil of wire is attached to that cylinder under the magazine of your rifle. As soon as the shell is automatically ejected this wire flies out also. A bit of scarlet tape is fixed to the end, so that it will be easy to pick up. There is also a snap-clasp on the end, and this clasp fits those rings that you see in the sand. Now, when you begin firing, it is my duty to run and pick up the wire ends and attach them to the rings. Then, you see, we have the body of the thermosaurus full of bullets, every bullet anchored to the shore by tiny wires, each of which could easily hold a ton's strain.'

"I looked at her in amazement.

"'Then,' she added, calmly, 'we have captured the thermosaurus.'

"'Your father,' said I, at length, 'must have spent years of labor over this preparation.'

"'It is the work of a lifetime,' she said, simply.

"My face, I suppose, showed my misgivings.

"'It must not fail,' she added.

"'But—but we are nowhere near the Gulf Stream,' I ventured.

"Her face brightened, and she frankly held the sunshade over us both.

"'Ah, you don't know,' she said, 'what else papa has discovered. Would you believe that he has found a loop in the Gulf Stream—a genuine loop—

that swings in here just outside of the breakers below? It is true! Everybody on Long Island knows that there is a warm current off the coast, but nobody imagined it was merely a sort of backwater from the Gulf Stream that formed a great circular mill-race around the cone of a subterranean volcano, and rejoined the Gulf Stream off Cape Albatross. But it is! That is why papa bought a yacht three years ago and sailed about for two years so mysteriously. Oh, I did want to go with him so much!'

"'This,' said I, 'is most astonishing.'

"She leaned enthusiastically towards me, her lovely face aglow.

"'Isn't it?' she said; 'and to think that you and papa and I are the only people in the whole world who know this!'

"To be included in such a triology was very delightful.

"'Papa is writing the whole thing—I mean about the currents. He also has in preparation sixteen volumes on the thermosaurus. He said this morning that he was going to ask you to write the story first for some scientific magazine. He is certain that Professor Bruce Stoddard, of Columbia, will write the pamphlets necessary. This will give papa time to attend to the sixteen-volume work, which he expects to finish in three years.'

"'Let us first,' said I, laughing, 'catch our thermosaurus.'

"'We must not fail,' she said, wistfully.

"'We shall not fail,' I said, 'for I promise to sit on this sand-hill as long as I live—until a thermosaurus appears—if that is your wish, Miss Holroyd.'

"Our eyes met for an instant. She did not chide me, either, for not looking at the ocean. Her eyes were bluer, anyway.

"'I suppose,' she said, bending her head and absently pouring sand between her fingers—'I suppose you think me a blue-stocking, or something odious?'

"'Not exactly,' I said. There was an emphasis in my voice that made her color. After a moment she laid the sunshade down, still open.

"'May I hold it?' I asked.

"She nodded almost imperceptibly.

"The ocean had turned a deep marine blue, verging on purple, that heralded a scorching afternoon. The wind died away; the odor of cedar and sweet-bay hung heavy in the air.

"In the sand at our feet an iridescent flower-beetle crawled, its metallic green-and-blue wings burning like a spark. Great gnats, with filmy, glittering wings, danced aimlessly above the young golden-rod; burnished crickets, inquisitive, timid, ran from under chips of driftwood, waved their antennae at us, and ran back again. One by one the marbled tiger-beetles tumbled at our feet, dazed from the exertion of an aërial flight, then scrambled and ran a little way, or darted into the wire grass, where great, brilliant spiders eyed them askance from their gossamer hammocks.

"Far out at sea the white gulls floated and drifted on the water, or sailed up into the air to flap lazily for a moment and settle back among the waves. Strings of black surf-ducks passed, their strong wings tipping the surface of the water; single wandering coots whirled from the breakers into lonely flight towards the horizon.

"We lay and watched the little ring-necks running along the water's edge, now backing away from the incoming tide, now boldly wading after the undertow. The harmony of silence, the deep perfume, the mystery of waiting for that something that all await—what is it? love? death? or only the miracle of another morrow?—troubled me with vague restlessness. As sunlight casts shadows, happiness, too, throws a shadow, and the shadow is sadness.

"And so the morning wore away until Freda came with a cool-looking hamper. Then delicious cold fowl and lettuce sandwiches and champagne cup set our tongues wagging as only very young tongues can wag. Daisy went back with Freda after luncheon, leaving me a case of cigars, with a bantering smile. I dozed, half awake, keeping a partly closed eye on the ocean, where a faint gray streak showed plainly amid the azure water all around. That was the Gulf Stream loop.

"About four o'clock Frisby appeared with a bamboo shelter-tent, for which I was unaffectedly grateful.

"After he had erected it over me he stopped to chat a bit, but the conversation bored me, for he could talk of nothing but bill-posting.

"'You wouldn't ruin the landscape here, would you?' I asked.

"'Ruin it!' repeated Frisby, nervously. 'It's ruined now; there ain't a place to stick a bill.'

"'The snipe stick bills—in the sand,' I said, flippantly.

"There was no humor about Frisby. 'Do they?' he asked.

"I moved with a certain impatience.

"'Bills,' said Frisby, 'give spice an' variety to nature. They break the monotony of the everlastin' green and what-you-may-call-its.'

"I glared at him.

"'Bills,' he continued, 'are not easy to stick, lemme tell you, sir. Sign-paintin's a soft snap when it comes to bill-stickin'. Now, I guess I've stuck more bills onto New York State than ennybody.'

"'Have you?' I said, angrily.

"'Yes, siree! I always pick out the purtiest spots—kinder filled chuck full of woods and brooks and things; then I h'ist my paste-pot onto a rock, and I slather that rock with gum, and whoop she goes!'

"'Whoop what goes?'

"'The bill. I paste her onto the rock, with one swipe of the brush for the edges and a back-handed swipe for the finish—except when a bill is folded in two halves.'

"'And what do you do then?' I asked, disgusted.

"'Swipe twice,' said Frisby, with enthusiasm.

"'And you don't think it injures the landscape?'

"'Injures it!' he exclaimed, convinced that I was attempting to joke.

"I looked wearily out to sea. He also looked at the water and sighed sentimentally.

"'Floatin' buoys with bills onto 'em is a idea of mine,' he observed. 'That damn ocean is monotonous, ain't it?'

"I don't know what I might have done to Frisby—the rifle was so convenient—if his mean yellow dog had not waddled up at this juncture.

"'Hi, Davy, sic 'em!' said Frisby, expectorating upon a clam-shell and hurling it seaward. The cur watched the flight of the shell apathetically, then squatted in the sand and looked at his master.

"'Kinder lost his spirit,' said Frisby, 'ain't he? I once stuck a bill onto Davy, an' it come off, an' the paste sorter sickened him. He was hell on rats—once!'

"After a moment or two Frisby took himself off, whistling cheerfully to Davy, who followed him when he was ready. The rifle burned in my fingers.

"It was nearly six o'clock when the professor appeared, spade on shoulder, boots smeared with mud.

"'Well,' he said, 'nothing to report, Dick, my boy?'

"'Nothing, professor.'

"He wiped his shining face with his handkerchief and stared at the water.

"'My calculations lead me to believe,' he said, 'that our prize may be due any day now. This theory I base upon the result of the report from the last sea-captain I saw. I cannot understand why some of these captains did not take the carcass in tow. They all say that they tried, but that the body sank before they could come within half a mile. The truth is, probably, that they did not stir a foot from their course to examine the thing.'

"'Have you ever cruised about for it?' I ventured.

"'For two years,' he said, grimly. 'It's no use; it's accident when a ship falls in with it. One captain reports it a thousand miles from where the last skipper spoke it, and always in the Gulf Stream. They think it is a different specimen every time, and the papers are teeming with sea-serpent fol-de-rol.'

"'Are you sure,' I asked, 'that it will swing into the coast on this Gulf Stream loop?'

"'I think I may say that it is certain to do so. I experimented with a dead right-whale. You may have heard of its coming ashore here last summer.'

"'I think I did,' said I, with a faint smile. The thing had poisoned the air for miles around.

"'But,' I continued, 'suppose it comes in the night?'

"He laughed.

"'There I am lucky. Every night this month, and every day, too, the current of the loop runs inland so far that even a porpoise would strand for at least twelve hours. Longer than that I have not experimented with, but I know that the shore trend of the loop runs across a long spur of the submerged volcanic mountain, and that anything heavier than a porpoise would scrape the bottom and be carried so slowly that at least twelve hours must elapse before the carcass could float again into deep water. There are chances of its stranding indefinitely, too, but I don't care to take those chances. That is why I have stationed you here, Dick.'

"He glanced again at the water, smiling to himself.

"'There is another question I want to ask,' I said, 'if you don't mind.'

"'Of course not!' he said, warmly.

"'What are you digging for?'

"'Why, simply for exercise. The doctor told me I was killing myself with my sedentary habits, so I decided to dig. I don't know a better exercise. Do you?'

"'I suppose not,' I murmured, rather red in the face. I wondered whether he'd mention fossils.

"'Did Daisy tell you why we are making our papier-maché thermosaurus?' he asked.

"I shook my head.

"'We constructed that from measurements I took from the fossil remains of the thermosaurus in the Metropolitan Museum. Professor Bruce Stoddard made the drawings. We set it up here, all ready to receive the skin of the carcass that I am expecting.'

"We had started towards home, walking slowly across the darkening dunes, shoulder to shoulder. The sand was deep, and walking was not easy.

"'I wish,' said I at last, 'that I knew why Miss Holroyd asked me not to walk on the beach. It's much less fatiguing.'

"'That,' said the professor, 'is a matter that I intend to discuss with you to-night.' He spoke gravely, almost sadly. I felt that something of unparalleled importance was soon to be revealed. So I kept very quiet, watching the ocean out of the corners of my eyes.

XX

Dinner was ended. Daisy Holroyd lighted her father's pipe for him, and insisted on my smoking as much as I pleased. Then she sat down, and folded her hands like a good little girl, waiting for her father to make the revelation which I felt in my bones must be something out of the ordinary.

"The professor smoked for a while, gazing meditatively at his daughter; then, fixing his gray eyes on me, he said:

"'Have you ever heard of the kree—that Australian bird, half parrot, half hawk, that destroys so many sheep in New South Wales?'

"I nodded.

"'The kree kills a sheep by alighting on its back and tearing away the flesh with its hooked beak until a vital part is reached. You know that? Well, it has been discovered that the kree had prehistoric prototypes. These birds were enormous creatures, who preyed upon mammoths and mastodons, and even upon the great saurians. It has been conclusively proved that a few saurians have been killed by the ancestors of the kree, but the favorite food of these birds was undoubtedly the thermosaurus. It is believed that the birds attacked the eyes of the thermosaurus, and when, as was its habit, the mammoth creature turned on its back to claw them, they fell upon the thinner scales of its stomach armor and finally killed it. This, or course, is a theory, but we have almost absolute proofs of its correctness. Now, these two birds are known among scientists as the ekaf-bird and the ool-yllik. The names are Australian, in which country most of their remains have been unearthed. They lived during the Carboniferous period. Now, it is not generally known, but the fact is, that in 1801 Captain Ransom, of the British exploring vessel *Gull,* purchased from the natives of Tasmania the skin of an ekaf-bird that could not have been killed more than twenty-four hours previous to its sale. I saw this skin in the British Museum. It was labelled, "Unknown bird, probably extinct." It took me exactly a week to satisfy myself that it was actually the skin of an ekaf-bird. But that is not all, Dick,' continued the professor, excitedly. 'In 1854 Admiral Stuart, of our own navy, saw the carcass of a strange, gigantic bird floating along the southern coast of Australia. Sharks were after it, and before a boat could be lowered these miserable fish got it. But the good old admiral secured a few feathers and sent them to the Smithsonian. I saw them. They were not even labelled, but I knew that they were feathers from the ekaf-bird or its near relative, the ool-yllik.'

"I had grown so interested that I had leaned far across the table. Daisy, too, bent forward. It was only when the professor paused for a moment that I noticed how close together our heads were—Daisy's and mine. I don't think she realized it. She did not move.

"'Now comes the important part of this long discourse,' said the professor, smiling at our eagerness. 'Ever since the carcass of our derelict thermosaurus was first noticed, every captain who has seen it has also reported the presence of one or more gigantic birds in the neighborhood. These birds, at a great distance, appeared to be hovering over the carcass, but on the approach of a vessel they disappeared. Even in mid-ocean they were observed. When I heard about it I was puzzled. A month later I was satisfied that neither the ekaf-bird nor the ool-yllik was extinct. Last Monday I knew that I was right. I found forty-eight distinct impressions of the huge, seven-toed claw of the ekaf-bird on the beach here at Pine Inlet. You may imagine my excitement. I succeeded in digging up enough wet sand around one of these impressions to preserve its form. I managed to get it into a soap-box, and now it is there in my shop. The tide rose too rapidly for me to save the other footprints.'

"I shuddered at the possibility of a clumsy misstep on my part obliterating the impression of an ool-yllik.

"'That is the reason that my daughter warned you off the beach,' he said, mildly.

"'Hanging would have been too good for the vandal who destroyed such priceless prizes,' I cried out, in self-reproach.

"Daisy Holroyd turned a flushed face to mine and impulsively laid her hand on my sleeve.

"'How could you know?' she said.

"'It's all right now,' said her father, emphasizing each word with a gentle tap of his pipe-bowl on the table-edge; 'don't be hard on yourself, Dick. You'll do yeoman's service yet.'

"It was nearly midnight, and still we chatted on about the thermosaurus, the ekaf-bird, and the ool-yllik, eagerly discussing the probability of the great reptile's carcass being in the vicinity. That alone seemed to explain the presence of these prehistoric birds at Pine Inlet.

"'Do they ever attack human beings?' I asked.

"The professor looked startled.

"'Gracious!' he exclaimed, 'I never thought of that. And Daisy running about out-of-doors! Dear me! It takes a scientist to be an unnatural parent!'

"His alarm was half real, half assumed; but, all the same, he glanced gravely at us both, shaking his handsome head, absorbed in thought. Daisy herself looked a little doubtful. As for me, my sensations were distinctly queer.

"'It is true,' said the professor, frowning at the wall, 'that human remains have been found associated with the bones of the ekaf-bird—I don't know how intimately. It is a matter to be taken into most serious consideration.'

"'The problem can be solved,' said I, 'in several ways. One is, to keep Miss Holroyd in the house—'

"'I shall not stay in,' cried Daisy, indignantly.

"We all laughed, and her father assured her that she should not be abused.

"'Even if I did stay in,' she said, 'one of these birds might alight on Master Dick.'

"She looked saucily at me as she spoke, but turned crimson when her father observed, quietly, 'You don't seem to think of me, Daisy!'

"'Of course I do,' she said, getting up and putting both arms around her father's neck; 'but Dick—as—as you call him—is so helpless and timid.'

"My blissful smile froze on my lips.

"'Timid!' I repeated.

"She came back to the table, making me a mocking reverence.

"'Do you think I am to be laughed at with impunity?' she said.

"'What are your other plans, Dick?" asked the professor. 'Daisy, let him alone, you little tease!'

"'One is, to haul a lot of cast-iron boilers along the dunes,' I said. 'If these birds come when the carcass floats in, and if they seem disposed to trouble us, we could crawl into the boilers and be safe.'

"'Why, that is really brilliant!' cried Daisy.

"'Be quiet, my child. Dick, the plan is sound and sensible and perfectly practical. McPeek and Frisby shall go for a dozen loads of boilers to-morrow.'

"'It will spoil the beauty of the landscape,' said Daisy, with a taunting nod to me.

"'And Frisby will probably attempt to cover them with bill-posters,' I added, laughing.

"'That,' said Daisy, 'I shall prevent, even at the cost of his life.' And she stood up, looking very determined.

"'Children, children,' protested the professor, 'go to bed—you bother me.'

"Then I turned deliberately to Miss Holroyd.

"'Good-night, Daisy,' I said.

"'Good-night, Dick,' she said, very gently.

XXI

The week passed quickly for me, leaving but few definite impressions. As I look back to it now I can see the long stretch of beach burning in the fierce sunlight, the endless meadows, with the glimmer of water in the distance, the dunes, the twisted cedars, the leagues of scintillating ocean, rocking, rocking, always rocking. In the starlit nights the curlew came in from the sand-bars by twos and threes; I could hear their querulous call as I lay in bed thinking. All day long the little ring-necks whistled from the shore. The plover answered them from distant, lonely inland pools. The great white gulls drifted like feathers upon the sea.

"One morning towards the end of the week, I, strolling along the dunes, came upon Frisby. He was bill-posting. I caught him red-handed.

"'This,' said I, 'must stop. Do you understand, Mr. Frisby?'

"He stepped back from his work, laying his head on one side, considering first me, then the bill that he had pasted on one of our big boilers.

"'Don't you like the color?' he asked. 'It goes well on them black boilers.'

"'Color! No, I don't like the color, either. Can't you understand that there are some people in the world who object to seeing patent-medicine advertisements scattered over a landscape?'

"'Hey?' he said, perplexed.

"'Will you kindly remove that advertisement?' I persisted.

"'Too late,' said Frisby; 'it's sot.'

"I was too disgusted to speak, but my disgust turned to anger when I perceived that, as far as the eye could reach, our boilers, lying from three to four hundred feet apart, were ablaze with yellow-and-red posters extolling the 'Eureka Liver Pill Company.'

"'It don't cost 'em nothing',' said Frisby, cheerfully; 'I done it fur the fun of it. Purty, ain't it?'

"'They are Professor Holroyd's boilers,' I said, subduing a desire to beat Frisby with my telescope. 'Wait until Miss Holroyd sees this work.'

"'Don't she like yeller and red?' he demanded, anxiously.

"'You'll find out,' said I.

"Frisby gaped at his handiwork and then at his yellow dog. After a moment he mechanically spat on a clam-shell and requested Davy to 'sic' it.

"'Can't you comprehend that you have ruined our pleasure in the landscape?' I asked, more mildly.

"'I've got some green bills,' said Frisby; 'I kin stick 'em over the yellow ones—'

"'Confound it,' said I, 'it isn't the color!'

"'Then,' observed Frisby, 'you don't like them pills. I've got some of the bills of the "Cropper Automobile" and a few of "Bagley, the Gents' Tailor"—'

"'Frisby,' said I, 'use them all—paste the whole collection over your dog and yourself—then walk off the cliff.'

"He sullenly unfolded a green poster, swabbed the boiler with paste, laid the upper section of the bill upon it, and plastered the whole bill down with a thwack of his brush. As I walked away I heard him muttering.

"Next day Daisy was so horrified that I promised to give Frisby an ultimatum. I found him with Freda, gazing sentimentally at his work, and I sent him back to the shop in a hurry, telling Freda at the same time that she could spend her leisure in providing Mr. Frisby with sand, soap, and a scrubbing-brush. Then I walked on to my post of observation.

"I watched until sunset. Daisy came with her father to hear my report, but there was nothing to tell, and we three walked slowly back to the house.

"In the evenings the professor worked on his volumes, the click of his type-writer sounding faintly behind his closed door. Daisy and I played chess sometimes; sometimes we played hearts. I don't remember that we ever finished a game of either—we talked too much.

"Our discussions covered every topic of interest: we argued upon politics; we skimmed over literature and music; we settled international differences; we spoke vaguely of human brotherhood. I say we slighted no subject of interest—I am wrong; we never spoke of love.

"Now, love is a matter of interest to ten people out of ten. Why it was that it did not appear to interest us is as interesting a question as love itself. We were young, alert, enthusiastic, inquiring. We eagerly absorbed theories concerning any curious phenomena in nature, as intellectual cocktails to stimulate discussion. And yet we did not discuss love. I do not say that we avoided it. No; the subject was too completely ignored for even that. And yet we found it very difficult to pass an hour separated. The professor noticed this, and laughed at us. We were not even embarrassed.

"Sunday passed in pious contemplation of the ocean. Daisy read a little in her prayer-book, and the professor threw a cloth over his type-writer and strolled up and down the sands. He may have been lost in devout abstraction; he may have been looking for footprints. As for me, my mind was very serene, and I was more than happy. Daisy read to me a little for my soul's sake, and the professor came up and said something cheerful. He also examined the magazine of my Winchester.

"That night, too, Daisy took her guitar to the sands and sang one or two Basque hymns. Unlike us, the Basques do not take their pleasures sadly. One of their pleasures is evidently religion.

"The big moon came up over the dunes and stared at the sea until the surface of every wave trembled with radiance. A sudden stillness fell across the world; the wind died out; the foam ran noiselessly across the beach; the cricket's rune was stilled.

"I leaned back, dropping one hand upon the sand. It touched another hand, soft and cool.

"After a while the other hand moved slightly, and I found that my own had closed above it. Presently one finger stirred a little—only a little—for our fingers were interlocked.

"On the shore the foam-froth bubbled and winked and glimmered in the moonlight. A star fell from the zenith, showering the night with incandescent dust.

"If our fingers lay interlaced beside us, her eyes were calm and serene as always, wide open, fixed upon the depths of a dark sky. And when her father rose and spoke to us, she did not withdraw her hand.

"'Is it late?' she asked, dreamily.

"'It is midnight, little daughter.'

"I stood up, still holding her hand, and aided her to rise. And when, at the door, I said good-night, she turned and looked at me for a little while in silence, then passed into her room slowly, with head still turned towards me.

"All night long I dreamed of her; and when the east whitened, I sprang up, the thunder of the ocean in my ears, the strong sea-wind blowing into the open window.

"'She is asleep,' I thought, and I leaned from the window and peered out into the east.

"The sea called to me, tossing its thousand arms; the soaring gulls, dipping, rising, wheeling above the sand-bar, screamed and clamored for a playmate. I slipped into my bathing-suit, dropped from the window upon the soft sand, and in a moment had plunged head foremost into the surf, swimming beneath the waves towards the open sea.

"Under the tossing ocean the voice of the waters was in my ears—a low, sweet voice, intimate, mysterious. Through singing foam and broad, green, glassy depths, by whispering sandy channels atrail with sea-weed, and on, on, out into the vague, cool sea, I sped, rising to the top, sinking, gliding. Then at last I flung myself out of water, hands raised, and the clamor of the gulls filled my ears.

"As I lay, breathing fast, drifting on the sea, far out beyond the gulls I saw a flash of white, and an arm was lifted, signalling me.

"'Daisy!' I called.

"A clear hail came across the water, distinct on the sea-wind, and at the same instant we raised our hands and moved towards each other.

"How we laughed as we met in the sea! The white dawn came up out of the depths, the zenith turned to rose and ashes.

"And with the dawn came the wind—a great sea-wind, fresh, aromatic, that hurled our voices back into our throats and lifted the sheeted spray above our heads. Every wave, crowned with mist, caught us in a cool embrace, cradled us, and slipped away, only to leave us to another wave, higher, stronger, crested with opalescent glory, breathing incense.

"We turned together up the coast, swimming lightly side by side, but our words were caught up by the winds and whirled into the sky.

"We looked up at the driving clouds; we looked out upon the pallid waste of waters, but it was into each other's eyes we looked, wondering, wistful, questioning the reason of sky and sea. And there in each other's eyes we read the mystery, and we knew that earth and sky and sea were created for us alone.

"Drifting on by distant sands and dunes, her white fingers touching mine, we spoke, keying our tones to the wind's vast harmony. And we spoke of love.

"Gray and wide as the limitless span of the sky and the sea, the winds gathered from the world's ends to bear us on; but they were not familiar winds; for now, along the coast, the breakers curled and showed a million fangs, and the ocean stirred to its depths, uneasy, ominous, and the menace of its murmur drew us closer as we moved.

"Where the dull thunder and the tossing spray warned us from sunken reefs, we heard the harsh challenges of gulls; where the pallid surf twisted in yellow coils of spume above the bar, the singing sands murmured of treachery and secrets of lost souls agasp in the throes of silent undertows.

"But there was a little stretch of beach glimmering through the mountains of water, and towards this we turned, side by side. Around us the water grew warmer; the breath of the following waves moistened our cheeks; the water itself grew gray and strange about us.

"'We have come too far,' I said; but she only answered:

"'Faster, faster! I am afraid!' The water was almost hot now; its aromatic odor filled our lungs.

"'The Gulf loop!' I muttered. 'Daisy, shall I help you?'

"'No. Swim—close by me! Oh-h! Dick—'

"Her startled cry was echoed by another—a shrill scream, unutterably horrible—and a great bird flapped from the beach, splashing and beating its pinions across the water with a thundering noise.

"Out across the waves it blundered, rising little by little from the water, and now, to my horror, I saw another monstrous bird swinging in the air above it, squealing as it turned on its vast wings. Before I could speak we touched the beach, and I half lifted her to the shore.

"'Quick!' I repeated. 'We must not wait.'

"Her eyes were dark with fear, but she rested a hand on my shoulder, and we crept up among the dune-grasses and sank down by the point of sand where the rough shelter stood, surrounded by the iron-ringed piles.

"She lay there, breathing fast and deep, dripping with spray. I had no power of speech left, but when I rose wearily to my knees and looked out upon the water my blood ran cold. Above the ocean, on the breast of the roaring wind, three enormous birds sailed, turning and wheeling among one another; and below, drifting with the gray stream of the Gulf loop, a colossal bulk lay half submerged—a gigantic lizard, floating belly upward.

"Then Daisy crept kneeling to my side and touched me, trembling from head to foot.

"'I know,' I muttered. 'I must run back for the rifle.'

"'And—and leave me?'

"I took her by the hand, and we dragged ourselves through the wire-grass to the open end of a boiler lying in the sand.

"She crept in on her hands and knees, and called to me to follow.

"'You are safe now,' I cried. 'I must go back for the rifle.'

"'The birds may—may attack you.'

"'If they do I can get into one of the other boilers,' I said. 'Daisy, you must not venture out until I come back. You won't, will you?'

"'No-o,' she whispered, doubtfully.

"'Then—good-bye.'

"'Good-bye,' she answered, but her voice was very small and still.

"'Good-bye,' I said again. I was kneeling at the mouth of the big iron tunnel; it was dark inside and I could not see her, but, before I was conscious of it, her arms were around my neck and we had kissed each other.

"I don't remember how I went away. When I came to my proper senses I was swimming along the coast at full speed, and over my head wheeled one of the birds, screaming at every turn.

"The intoxication of that innocent embrace, the close impress of her arms around my neck, gave me a strength and recklessness that neither fear nor fatigue could subdue. The bird above me did not even frighten me. I watched it over my shoulder, swimming strongly, with the tide now aiding me, now stemming my course; but I saw the shore passing quickly, and my strength increased, and I shouted when I came in sight of the house, and scrambled up on the sand, dripping and excited. There was nobody in sight, and I gave a last glance up into the air where the bird wheeled, still screeching, and hastened into the house. Freda stared at me in amazement as I seized the rifle and shouted for the professor.

"'He has just gone to town, with Captain McPeek in his wagon,' stammered Freda.

"'What!' I cried. 'Does he know where his daughter is?'

"'Miss Holroyd is asleep—not?' gasped Freda.

"'Where's Frisby?' I cried, impatiently.

"'Yimmie?' quavered Freda.

"'Yes, Jimmie; isn't there anybody here? Good Heavens! where's that man in the shop?'

"'He also iss gone,' said Freda, shedding tears, 'to buy papier-maché. Yimmie, he iss gone to post bills.'

"I waited to hear no more, but swung my rifle over my shoulder, and, hanging the cartridge-belt across my chest, hurried out and up the beach. The bird was not in sight.

"I had been running for perhaps a minute when, far up on the dunes, I saw a yellow dog rush madly through a clump of sweet-bay, and at the same moment a bird soared past, rose, and hung hovering just above the thicket. Suddenly the bird swooped; there was a shriek and a yelp from the cur, but the bird gripped it in one claw and beat its wings upon the sand, striving to rise. Then I saw Frisby—paste, bucket, and brush raised—fall upon the bird, yelling lustily. The fierce creature relaxed its talons, and the dog rushed on, squeaking with terror. The bird turned on Frisby and sent him sprawling on his face, a sticky mass of paste and sand. But this did not end the struggle. The bird, croaking horridly, flew at the prostrate bill-poster, and the sand whirled into a pillar above its terrible wings. Scarcely knowing what I was about, I raised my rifle and fired twice. A scream echoed each shot, and the bird rose heavily in a shower of sand; but two bullets were embedded in that mass of foul feathers, and I saw the wires and scarlet tape uncoiling on the sand at my feet. In an instant I seized them and passed the ends around a cedar-tree, hooking the clasps tight. Then I cast one swift glance upward, where the bird wheeled, screeching, anchored like a kite to the pallium wires; and I hurried on across the dunes, the shells cutting my feet and the bushes tearing my wet swimming-suit, until I dripped with blood from shoulder to ankle. Out in the ocean the carcass of the thermosaurus floated, claws outspread, belly glistening in the gray light, and over him circled two birds. As I reached the shelter I knelt and fired into the mass of scales, and at my first shot a horrible thing occurred—the lizard-like head writhed, the slitted yellow eyes sliding open from the film that covered them. A shudder passed across the undulating body, the great scaled belly heaved, and one leg feebly clawed at the air.

"The thing was still alive!

"Crushing back the horror that almost paralyzed my hands, I planted shot after shot into the quivering reptile, while it writhed and clawed, striving to turn over and dive; and at each shot the black blood spurted in long, slim jets across the water. And now Daisy was at my side, pale and determined, swiftly clasping each tape-marked wire to the iron rings in the circle around us. Twice I filled the magazine from my belt, and twice I poured streams of steel-tipped bullets into the scaled mass, twisting and shuddering on the sea. Suddenly the birds steered towards us. I felt the wind from their vast wings. I saw the feathers erect, vibrating. I saw the spread claws outstretched, and I struck furiously at them, crying to Daisy to run into the iron shelter. Backing, swinging my clubbed rifle, I retreated, but I tripped across one of the taut pallium wires, and in an instant the hideous birds were on me, and the bone in my forearm snapped like a pipe-stem at a blow from their wings. Twice I struggled to my knees, blinded with blood, confused, almost fainting; then I fell again, rolling into the mouth of the iron boiler.

* * *

"When I struggled back to consciousness Daisy knelt silently beside me, while Captain McPeek and Professor Holroyd bound up my shattered arm, talking excitedly. The pain made me faint and dizzy. I tried to speak and could not. At last they got me to my feet and into the wagon, and Daisy came, too, and crouched beside me, wrapped in oilskins to her eyes. Fatigue, lack of food, and excitement had combined with wounds and broken bones to extinguish the last atom of strength in my body; but my mind was clear enough to understand that the trouble was over and the thermosaurus safe.

"I heard McPeek say that one of the birds that I had anchored to a cedar-tree had torn loose from the bullets and had winged its way heavily out to sea. The professor answered: 'Yes, the ekaf-bird; the others were oolylliks. I'd have given my right arm to have secured them.' Then for a time I heard no more; but the jolting of the wagon over the dunes roused me to keenest pain, and I held out my right hand to Daisy. She clasped it in both of hers, and kissed it again and again.

* * *

"There is little more to add, I think. Professor Bruce Stoddard's scientific pamphlet will be published soon, to be followed by Professor Holroyd's sixteen volumes. In a few days the stuffed and mounted thermosaurus will be placed on free public exhibition in the arena of Madison Square Garden, the only building in the city large enough to contain the body of this immense winged reptile."

* * *

The young man hesitated, looking long and earnestly at Miss Barrison.

"Did you marry her?" she asked, softly.

"You wouldn't believe it," said the young man, earnestly—"you wouldn't believe it, after all that happened, if I should tell you that she married Professor Bruce Stoddard, of Columbia—would you?"

"Yes, I would," said Miss Barrison. "You never can tell what a girl will do."

"That story of yours," I said, "is to me the most wonderful and valuable contribution to nature study that it has ever been my fortune to listen to. You are fitted to write; it is your sacred mission to produce. Are you going to?"

"I am writing," said the young man, quietly, "a nature book. Sir Peter Grebe's magnificent monograph on the speckled titmouse inspired me. But nature study is not what I have chosen as my life's mission."

He looked dreamily across at Miss Barrison. "No, not natural phenomena," he repeated, "but unnatural phenomena. What Professor Hyssop has done for Columbia, I shall attempt to do for Harvard. In fact, I have already accepted the chair of Psychical Phenomena at Cambridge."

I gazed upon him with intense respect.

"A personal experience revealed to me my life's work," he went on, thoughtfully stroking his blond mustache. "If Miss Barrison would care to hear it—"

"Please tell it," she said, sweetly.

"I shall have to relate it clothed in that artificial garb known as literary style," he explained, deprecatingly.

"It doesn't matter," I said, "I never noticed any style at all in your story of the thermosaurus."

He smiled gratefully, and passed his hand over his face; a far-away expression came into his eyes, and he slowly began, hesitating, as though talking to himself:

XXII

It was high noon in the city of Antwerp. From slender steeples floated the mellow music of the Flemish bells, and in the spire of the great cathedral across the square the cracked chimes clashed discords until my ears ached.

"When the fiend in the cathedral had jerked the last tuneless clang from the chimes, I removed my fingers from my ears and sat down at one of the iron tables in the court. A waiter, with his face shaved blue, brought me a bottle of Rhine wine, a tumbler of cracked ice, and a siphon.

"'Does monsieur desire anything else?' he inquired.

"'Yes—the head of the cathedral bell-ringer; bring it with vinegar and potatoes,' I said, bitterly. Then I began to ponder on my great-aunt and the Crimson Diamond.

"The white walls of the Hôtel St. Antoine rose in a rectangle around the sunny court, casting long shadows across the basin of the fountain. The strip of blue overhead was cloudless. Sparrows twittered under the eaves, the yellow awnings fluttered, the flowers swayed in the summer breeze, and the jet of the fountain splashed among the water-plants. On the sunny side of the piazza the tables were vacant; on the shady side I was lazily aware that the tables behind me were occupied, but I was indifferent as to their occupants, partly because I shunned all tourists, partly because I was thinking of my great-aunt.

"Most old ladies are eccentric, but there is a limit, and my great-aunt had overstepped it. I had believed her to be wealthy—she died bankrupt. Still, I knew there was one thing she did possess, and that was the famous Crimson Diamond. Now, of course, you know who my great-aunt was.

"Excepting the Koh-i-noor and the Regent, this enormous and unique stone was, as everybody knows, the most valuable gem in existence. Any ordinary person would have placed that diamond in a safe-deposit. My great-aunt did nothing of the kind. She kept it in a small velvet bag, which she carried about her neck. She never took it off, but wore it dangling openly on her heavy silk gown.

"In this same bag she also carried dried catnip-leaves, of which she was inordinately fond. Nobody but myself, her only living relative, knew that the Crimson Diamond lay among the sprigs of catnip in the little velvet bag.

"'Harold,' she would say, 'do you think I'm a fool? If I place the Crimson Diamond in any safe-deposit vault in New York, somebody will steal it, sooner or later.' Then she would nibble a sprig of catnip and peer cunningly at me. I loathed the odor of catnip and she knew it. I also loathed cats. This also she knew, and of course surrounded herself with a dozen. Poor old lady! One day she was found dead in her bed in her apartments at the Waldorf. The doctor said she died from natural causes. The only other occupant of her sleeping-room was a cat. The cat fled when we broke open the door, and I heard that she was received and cherished by some eccentric people in a neighboring apartment.

"Now, although my great-aunt's death was due to purely natural causes, there was one very startling and disagreeable feature of the case. The velvet bag containing the Crimson Diamond had disappeared. Every inch of the apartment was searched, the floors torn up, the walls dismantled, but the Crimson Diamond had vanished. Chief of Police Conlon detailed four of his best men on the case, and, as I had nothing better to do, I enrolled myself as a volunteer. I also offered $25,000 reward for the recovery of the gem. All New York was agog.

"The case seemed hopeless enough, although there were five of us after the thief. McFarlane was in London, and had been for a month, but Scotland Yard could give him no help, and the last I heard of him he was roaming through Surrey after a man with a white spot in his hair. Harrison had gone to Paris. He kept writing me that clews were plenty and the scent hot, but as Dennet, in Berlin, and Clancy, in Vienna, wrote me the same thing, I began to doubt these gentlemen's ability.

"'You say,' I answered Harrison, 'that the fellow is a Frenchman, and that he is now concealed in Paris; but Dennet writes me by the same mail that the thief is undoubtedly a German, and was seen yesterday in Berlin. To-day I received a letter from Clancy, assuring me that Vienna holds the culprit, and that he is an Austrian from Trieste. Now, for Heaven's sake,' I ended, 'let me alone and stop writing me letters until you have something to write about.'

"The night-clerk at the Waldorf had furnished us with our first clew. On the night of my aunt's death he had seen a tall, grave-faced man hurriedly leave the hotel. As the man passed the desk he removed his hat and mopped his forehead, and the night-clerk noticed that in the middle of his head there was a patch of hair as white as snow.

"We worked this clew for all it was worth, and, a month later, I received a cable despatch from Paris, saying that a man answering to the description of the Waldorf suspect had offered an enormous crimson diamond for sale to a jeweller in the Palais Royal. Unfortunately, the fellow took fright and disappeared before the jeweller could send for the police, and since that time

McFarlane in London, Harrison in Paris, Dennet in Berlin, and Clancy in Vienna had been chasing me with white patches on their hair until no gray-headed patriarch in Europe was free from suspicion. I myself had sleuthed it through England, France, Holland, and Belgium, and now I found myself in Antwerp at the Hôtel St. Antoine, without a clew that promised anything except another outrage on some respectable white-haired citizen. The case seemed hopeless enough, unless the thief tried again to sell the gem. Here was our only hope, for, unless he cut the stone into smaller ones, he had no more chance of selling it than he would have had if he had stolen the Venus of Milo and peddled here about the Rue de Seine. Even were he to cut up the stone, no respectable gem collector or jeweller would buy a crimson diamond without first notifying me; for although a few red stones are known to collectors, the color of the Crimson Diamond was absolutely unique, and there was little probability of an honest mistake.

"Thinking of all these things, I sat sipping my Rhine wine in the shadow of the yellow awnings. A large white cat came sauntering by and stopped in front of me to perform her toilet, until I wished she would go away. After a while she sat up, licked her whiskers, yawned once or twice, and was about to stroll on, when, catching sight of me, she stopped short and looked me squarely in the face. I returned the attention with a scowl, because I wished to discourage any advances towards social intercourse which she might contemplate; but after a while her steady gaze disconcerted me, and I turned to my Rhine wine. A few minutes later I looked up again. The cat was still eyeing me.

"'Now what the devil is the matter with the animal,' I muttered; 'does she recognize in me a relative?'

"'Perhaps,' observed a man at the next table.

"'What do you mean by that?' I demanded.

"'What I say,' replied the man at the next table.

"I looked him full in the face. He was old and bald and appeared weak-minded. His age protected his impudence. I turned my back on him. Then my eyes fell on the cat again. She was still gazing earnestly at me.

"Disgusted that she should take such pointed public notice of me, I wondered whether other people saw it; I wondered whether there was anything peculiar in my own personal appearance. How hard the creature stared! It was most embarrassing.

"'What has got into that cat?' I thought. 'It's sheer impudence. It's an intrusion, and I won't stand it!' The cat did not move. I tried to stare her out of countenance. It was useless. There was aggressive inquiry in her yellow eyes. A sensation of uneasiness began to steal over me—a sensation of embarrassment not unmixed with awe. All cats looked alike to me, and yet there was something about this one that bothered me—something that I could not explain to myself, but which began to occupy me.

"She looked familiar—this Antwerp cat. An odd sense of having seen her before, of having been well acquainted with her in former years, slowly settled in my mind, and, although I could never remember the time when I had not detested cats, I was almost convinced that my relations with this Antwerp tabby had once been intimate if not cordial. I looked more closely at the animal. Then an idea struck me—an idea which persisted and took definite shape in spite of me. I strove to escape from it, to evade it, to stifle and smother it; an inward struggle ensued which brought the perspiration in beads upon my cheeks—a struggle short, sharp, decisive. It was useless—useless to try to put it from me—this idea so wretchedly bizarre, so grotesque and fantastic, so utterly inane—it was useless to deny that the cat bore a distinct resemblance to my great-aunt!

"I gazed at her in horror. What enormous eyes the creature had!

"'Blood is thicker than water,' said the man at the next table.

"'What does he mean by that?' I muttered, angrily, swallowing a tumbler of Rhine wine and seltzer. But I did not turn. What was the use?

"'Chattering old imbecile,' I added to myself, and struck a match, for my cigar was out; but, as I raised the match to relight it, I encountered the cat's eyes again. I could not enjoy my cigar with the animal staring at me, but I was justly indignant, and I did not intend to be routed. 'The idea! Forced to leave for a cat!' I sneered. 'We will see who will be the one to go!' I tried to give her a jet of seltzer from the siphon, but the bottle was too nearly empty to carry far. Then I attempted to lure her nearer, calling her in French, German, and English, but she did not stir. I did not know the Flemish for 'cat.'

"'She's got a name, and won't come' I thought. 'Now, what under the sun can I call her?'

"'Aunty,' suggested the man at the next table.

"I sat perfectly still. Could that man have answered my thoughts?—for I had not spoken aloud. Of course not—it was a coincidence—but a very disgusting one.

"'Aunty,' I repeated, mechanically, 'aunty, aunty—good gracious, how horribly human that cat looks!' Then, somehow or other, Shakespeare's words crept into my head and I found myself repeating: 'The soul of my grandam might haply inhabit a bird; the soul of—nonsense!' I growled—'it isn't printed correctly! One might possibly say, speaking in poetical metaphor, that the soul of a bird might haply inhabit one's grandam—' I stopped short, flushing painfully. 'What awful rot!' I murmured, and lighted another cigar. The cat was still staring; the cigar went out. I grew more and more nervous. 'What rot!' I repeated. 'Pythagoras must have been an ass, but

I do believe there are plenty of asses alive to-day who swallow that sort of thing.'

"'Who knows?' sighed the man at the next table, and I sprang to my feet and wheeled about. But I only caught a glimpse of a pair of frayed coat-tails and a bald head vanishing into the dining-room. I sat down again, thoroughly indignant. A moment later the cat got up and went away.

XXIII

Daylight was fading in the city of Antwerp. Down into the sea sank the sun, tinting the vast horizon with flakes of crimson, and touching with rich deep undertones the tossing waters of the Scheldt. Its glow fell like a rosy mantle over red-tiled roofs and meadows; and through the haze the spires of twenty churches pierced the air like sharp, gilded flames. To the west and south the green plains, over which the Spanish armies tramped so long ago, stretched away until they met the sky; the enchantment of the afterglow had turned old Antwerp into fairy-land; and sea and sky and plain were beautiful and vague as the night-mists floating in the moats below.

"Along the sea-wall from the Rubens Gate all Antwerp strolled, and chattered , and flirted, and sipped their Flemish wines from slender Flemish glasses, or gossiped over krugs of foaming beer.

"From the Scheldt came the cries of sailors, the creaking of cordage, and the puff! puff! of the ferry-boats. On the bastions of the fortress opposite, a bugler was standing. Twice the mellow notes of the bugle came faintly over the water, then a great gun thundered from the ramparts, and the Belgian flag fluttered along the lanyards to the ground.

"I leaned listlessly on the sea-wall and looked down at the Scheldt below. A battery of artillery was embarking for the fortress. The tublike transport lay hissing and whistling in the slip, and the stamping of horses, the rumbling of gun and caisson, and the sharp cries of the officers came plainly to the ear.

"When the last caisson was aboard and stowed, and the last trooper had sprung jingling to the deck, the transport puffed out into the Scheldt, and I turned away through the throng of promenaders, and found a little table on the terrace, just outside of the pretty café. And as I sat down I became aware of a girl at the next table—a girl all in white—the most ravishingly and distractingly pretty girl that I had ever seen. In the agitation of the moment I forgot my name, my fortune, my aunt, and the Crimson Diamond—all these I forgot in a purely human impulse to see clearly; and to that end I removed my monocle from my left eye. Some moments later I came to myself and feebly replaced it. It was too late; the mischief was done. I was not aware at first of the exact state of my feelings—for I had never been in love more than three or four times in all my life—but I did know that at her request I would have been proud to stand on my head or turn a flip-flap into the Scheldt.

"I did not stare at her, but I managed to see her most of the time when her eyes were in another direction. I found myself drinking something which a waiter brought, presumably upon an order which I did not remember having given. Later I noticed that it was a loathsome drink which the Belgians call 'American grog,' but I swallowed it and lighted a cigarette. As the fragrant cloud rose in the air, a voice, which I recognized with a chill, broke into my dream of enchantment. Could *he* have been there all the while—there sitting beside that vision in white? His hat was off, and the ocean-breezes whispered about his bald head. His frayed coat-tails were folded carefully over his knees, and between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand he balanced a bad cigar. He looked at me in a mildly cheerful way, and said, 'I know now.'

"'Know what?' I asked, thinking it better to humor him, for I was convinced that he was mad.

"'I know why cats bite.'

"This was startling. I hadn't an idea what to say.

"'I know why,' he repeated; 'can you guess why?' There was a covert tone of triumph in his voice and he smiled encouragement. 'Come, try and guess,' he urged.

"I told him that I was unequal to problems.

"'Listen, young man,' he continued, folding his coat-tails closely about his legs—'try to reason it out: why should cats bite? Don't you know? I do.'

"He looked at me anxiously.

"'You take no interest in this problem?' he demanded.

"'Oh yes.'

"'Then why do you not ask me why?' he said, looking vaguely disappointed.

"'Well,' I said, in desperation, 'why do cats bite?—hang it all!' I thought, 'it's like a burned-cork show, and I'm Mr. Bones and he's Tambo!'

"Then he smiled gently. 'Young man,' he said, 'cats bite because they feed on catnip. I have reasoned it out.'

"I stared at him in blank astonishment. Was this benevolent-looking old party poking fun at me? Was he paying me up for the morning's snub? Was he a malignant and revengeful old party, or was he merely feeble-minded? Who might he be? What was he doing here in Antwerp—what was he doing now?—for the bald one had turned familiarly to the beautiful girl in white.

"'Wilhelmina,' he said, 'do you feel chilly?' The girl shook her head.

"'Not in the least, papa.'

"'Her father!' I thought—'her father!' Thank God she did not say 'popper'!

"'I have been to the Zoo to-day,' announced the bald one, turning towards me.

"'Ah, indeed,' I observed; 'er—I trust you enjoyed it.'

"'I have been contemplating the apes,' he continued, dreamily. 'Yes, contemplating the apes.'

"I tried to look interested.

"'Yes, the apes,' he murmured, fixing his mild eyes on me. Then he leaned towards me confidentially and whispered, 'Can you tell me what a monkey thinks?'

"'I cannot,' I replied, sharply.

"'Ah,' he sighed, sinking back in his chair, and patting the slender hand of the girl beside him—'ah, who can tell what a monkey thinks?' His gentle face lulled my suspicions, and I replied, very gravely:

"'Who can tell whether they think at all?'

"'True, true! Who can tell whether they think at all; and if they do think, ah! who can tell what they think?'

"'But,' I began, 'if you can't tell whether they think at all, what's the use of trying to conjecture what they *would* think if they *did* think?'

"He raised his hand in deprecation. 'Ah, it is exactly that which is of such absorbing interest—exactly that! It is the abstruseness of the proposition which stimulates research—which stirs profoundly the brain of the thinking world. The question is of vital and instant importance. Possibly you have already formed an opinion.'

"I admitted that I had thought but little on the subject.

"'I doubt,' he continued, swathing his knees in his coat-tails—'I doubt whether you have given much attention to the subject lately discussed by the Boston Dodo Society of Pythagorean Research.'

"'I am not sure,' I said, politely, 'that I recall that particular discussion. May I ask what was the question brought up?'

"'The *Felis domestica* question.'

"'Ah, that must indeed be interesting! And—er—what may be the *Felis* do—do—'

"'*Domestica*—not dodo. *Felis domestica*, the common or garden cat.'

"'Indeed,' I murmured.

"'You are not listening,' he said.

"'I only half heard him. I could not turn my eyes from his daughter's face.

"'Cat!' shouted the bald one, and I almost leaped from my chair. 'Are you deaf?' he inquired, sympathetically.

"'No—oh no!' I replied, coloring with confusion; 'you were—pardon me—you were—er—speaking of the dodo. Extraordinary bird that—'

"'I was not discussing the dodo,' he sighed. 'I was speaking of cats.'

"'Of course,' I said.

"'The question is,' he continued, twisting his frayed coat-tails into a sort of rope—'the question is, how are we to ameliorate the present condition and social status of our domestic cats?'

"'Feed 'em,' I suggested.

"He raised both hands. They were eloquent with patient expostulation. 'I mean their spiritual condition,' he said.

"I nodded, but my eyes reverted to that exquisite face. She sat silent, her eyes fixed on the waning flecks of color in the western sky.

"'Yes,' repeated the bald one, 'the spiritual welfare of our domestic cats.'

"'Toms and tabbies?' I murmured.

"'Exactly,' he said, tying a large knot in his coat-tails.

"'You will ruin your coat,' I observed.

"'Papa!" exclaimed the girl, turning in dismay, as that gentleman gave a guilty start, 'stop it at once!'

"He smiled apologetically and a made a feeble attempt to conceal his coat-tails.

"'My dear,' he said, with gentle deprecation, 'I am so absent-minded—I always do it in the heat of argument.'

"The girl rose, and, bending over her untidy parent, deftly untied the knot in his flapping coat. When he was disentangled, she sat down and said, with a ghost of a smile, 'He is so very absent-minded.'

"'Your father is evidently a great student,' I ventured, pleasantly. How I pitied her, tied to this old lunatic!

"'Yes, he is a great student,' she said, quietly.

"'I am,' he murmured; 'that's what makes me so absent-minded. I often go to bed and forget to sleep.' Then, looking at me, he asked me my name, adding, with a bow, that his name was P. Royal Wyeth, Professor of Pythagorean Research and Abstruse Paradox.

"'My first name is Penny—named after Professor Penny, of Harvard,' he said; 'but I seldom use my first name in connection with my second, as the combination suggests a household remedy of penetrating odor.'

"'My name is Kensett,' I said, 'Harold Kensett, of New York.'

"'Student?'

"'Er—a little.'

"'Student of diamonds?'

"I smiled. 'Oh, I see you know who my great-aunt was,' I said.

"'I know her,' he said.

"'Ah—perhaps you are unaware that my great-aunt is not now living.'

"'I know her,' he repeated, obstinately.

"I bowed. What a crank he was!

"'What do you study? You don't fiddle away all your time, do you?' he asked.

"Now that was just what I did, but I was not pleased to have Miss Wyeth know it. Although my time was chiefly spent in killing time, I had once, in a fit of energy, succeeded in writing some verses, 'To a Tomtit,' so I evaded a humiliating confession by saying that I had done a little work in ornithology.

"'Good!' cried the professor, beaming all over. 'I knew you were a fellow-scientist. Possibly you are a brother-member of the Boston Dodo Society of Pythagorean Research. Are you a dodo?'

"I shook my head. 'No, I am not a dodo.'

"'Only a jay?'

"'A—what?' I said, angrily.

"'A jay. We call the members of the junior Ornithological Jay Society of New York, jays, just as we refer to ourselves as dodos. Are you not even a jay?'

"'I am not,' I said, watching him suspiciously.

"'I must convert you, I see,' said the professor, smiling.

"'I'm afraid I do not approve of Pythagorean research,' I began, but the beautiful Miss Wyeth turned to me very seriously, and, looking me frankly in the eyes, said:

"'I trust you will be open to conviction.'

"'Good Lord!' I thought. 'Can she be another lunatic?' I looked at her steadily. What a little beauty she was! She also, then, belonged to the Pythagoreans—a sect I despised. Everybody knows all about the Pythagorean craze, its rise in Boston, its rapid spread, and its subsequent consolidation with mental and Christian science, theosophy, hypnotism, the Salvation Army, the Shakers, the Dunkards, and the mind-cure cult, upon a business basis. I had hitherto regarded all Pythagoreans with the same scornful indifference which I accorded to the faith-curists; being a member of no particular church, I was scarcely prepared to take any of them seriously. Least of all did I approve of the 'business basis,' and I looked very much askance indeed at the 'Scientific and Religious Trust Company,' duly incorporated and generally known as the Pythagorean Trust, which, consolidating with mind-curists, faith-curists, and other flourishing salvation syndicates, actually claimed a place among ordinary trusts, and at the same time pretended to a control over man's future life. No, I could never listen—I was ashamed of even entertaining the notion, and I shook my head.

"'No, Miss Wyeth, I am afraid I do not care to listen to any reasoning on this subject.'

"'Don't you believe in Pythagoras?' demanded the professor, subduing his excitement with difficulty, and adding another knot to his coat-tails.

"'No,' I said, 'I do not.'

"'How do you know you don't?' inquired the professor.

"'Because,' I said, firmly, 'it is nonsense to say that the soul of a human being can inhabit a hen!'

"'Put it in a more simplified form!' insisted the professor. 'Do you believe that the soul of a hen can inhabit a human being?'

"'No, I don't!'

"'Did you ever hear of a hen-pecked man?' cried the professor, his voice ending in a shout.

"I nodded, intensely annoyed.

"'Will you listen to reason, then?' he continued, eagerly.

"'No,' I began, but I caught Miss Wyeth's blue eyes fixed on mine with an expression so sad, so sweetly appealing, that I faltered.

"'Yes, I will listen,' I said, faintly.

"'Will you become my pupil?' insisted the professor.

"I was shocked to find myself wavering, but my eyes were looking into hers, and I could not disobey what I read there. The longer I looked the greater inclination I felt to waver. I saw that I was going to give in, and, strangest of all, my conscience did not trouble me. I felt it coming—a sort of mild exhilaration took possession of me. For the first time in my life I became reckless—I even gloried in my recklessness.

"'Yes, yes,' I cried, leaning eagerly across the table, 'I shall be glad—delighted! Will you take me as your pupil?' My single eye-glass fell from its position unheeded. 'Take me! Oh, will you take me?' I cried. Instead of answering, the professor blinked rapidly at me for a moment. I imagined his eyes had grown bigger, and were assuming a greenish tinge. The corners of his mouth began to quiver, emitting queer, caressing little noises, and he rapidly added knot after knot to his twitching coat-tails. Suddenly he bent forward across the table until his nose almost touched mine. The pupils of his eyes expanded, the iris assuming a beautiful, changing, golden-green tinge, and his coat-tails switched, violently. Then he began to mew.

"I strove to rouse myself from my paralysis—I tried to shrink back, for I felt the end of his cold nose touch mine. I could not move. The cry of terror died in my straining throat, my hands tightened convulsively; I was incapable of speech or motion. At the same time my brain became wonderfully clear. I began to remember everything that had ever happened to me—everything that I had ever done or said. I even remembered things that I had neither done nor said; I recalled distinctly much that had never happened. How fresh and strong my memory! The past was a like a mirror, crystal clear, and there, in glorious tints and hues, the scenes of my childhood grew and glowed and faded, and gave place to newer and more splendid scenes. For a moment the episode of the cat at the Hôtel St. Antoine flashed across my mind. When it vanished a chilly stupor slowly clouded my brain; the scenes, the memories, the brilliant colors, faded, leaving me enveloped in a gray vapor, through which the two great eyes of the professor twinkled with a murky light. A peculiar longing stirred me—a strange yearning for something, I knew not what—but, oh! how I longed and yearned for it! Slowly this indefinite, incomprehensible longing became a living pain. Ah, how I suffered, and how the vapors seemed to crowd around me! Then, as at a great distance, I heard her voice, sweet, imperative:

"'Mew!' she said.

"For a moment I seemed to see the interior of my own skull, lighted as by a flash of fire; the rolling eyeballs, veined in scarlet, the glistening muscles quivering along the jaw, the humid masses of the convoluted brain; then awful darkness—a darkness almost tangible—an utter blackness, through which now seemed to creep a thin, silver thread, like a river crawling across a world—like a thought gliding to the brain—like a song, a thin, sharp song which some distant voice was singing—which I was singing.

"And I knew that I was mewing!

"I threw myself back in my chair and mewed with all my heart. Oh, that heavy load which was lifted from my breast! How good, how satisfying it was to mew! And how I did miaul and yowl!

"I gave myself up to it, heart and soul; my whole being thrilled with the passionate outpourings of a spirit freed. My voice trembled in the upper bars of a feline love-song, quavered, descended, swelling again into an intimation that I brooked no rival, and ended with a magnificent crescendo.

"I finished, somewhat abashed, and glanced askance at the professor and his daughter, but the one sat nonchalantly disentangling his coat-tails, and the other was apparently absorbed in the distant landscape. Evidently they did not consider me ridiculous. Flushing painfully, I turned in my chair to see how my grewsome solo had affected the people on the terrace. Nobody even looked at me. This, however, gave me little comfort, for, as I began to realize what I had done, my mortification and rage knew no bounds. I was ready to die of shame. What on earth had induced me to mew? I looked wildly about for escape—I would leap up—rush home to bury my burning face in my pillows, and, later, in the friendly cabin of a homeward-bound steamer. I would fly—fly at once! Woe to the man who blocked my way! I started to my feet, but at that moment I caught Miss Wyeth's eyes fixed on mine.

"'Don't go,' she said.

"'What in Heaven's name lay in those blue eyes? I slowly sank back into my chair.

"Then the professor spoke: 'Wilhelmina, I have just received a despatch.'

"'Where from, papa?'

"'From India. I'm going at once.'

"She nodded her head, without turning her eyes from the sea. 'Is it important, papa?'

"'I should say so. The cashier of the local trust has compromised an astral body, and has squandered on her all our funds, including a lot of first mortgages on Nirvana. I suppose he's been dabbling in futures and is short in his accounts. I sha'n't be gone long.'

"'Then, good-night, papa,' she said, kissing him; 'try to be back by eleven.' I sat stupidly staring at them.

"'Oh, it's only to Bombay—I sha'n't to Thibet to-night—good-night, my dear,' said the professor.

"Then a singular thing occurred. The professor had at last succeeded in disentangling his coat-tails, and now, jamming his hat over his ears, and waving his arms with a batlike motion, he climbed upon the seat of his chair and ejaculated the word 'Presto!' Then I found my voice.

"'Stop him!' I cried, in terror.

"'Presto! Presto!' shouted the professor, balancing himself on the edge of his chair and waving his arms majestically, as if preparing for a sudden flight across the Scheldt; and, firmly convinced that he not only meditated it, but was firmly capable of attempting it, I covered my eyes with my hands.

"'Are you ill, Mr. Kensett?' asked the girl, quietly.

"I raised my head indignantly. 'Not at all, Miss Wyeth, only I'll bid you good-evening, for this is the nineteenth century, and I'm a Christian.'

"'So am I,' she said. 'So is my father.'

"'The devil he is,' I thought.

"Her next words made me jump.

"'Please do not be profane, Mr. Kensett.'

"How did she know I was profane? I had not spoken a word! Could it be possible she was able to read my thoughts? This was too much, and I rose.

"'I have the honor to bid you good-evening,' I began, and reluctantly turned to include the professor, expecting to see that gentleman balancing himself on his chair. The professor's chair was empty.

"'Oh,' said the girl, smiling, 'my father has gone.'

"'Gone! Where?'

"'To—to India, I believe.'

"I sank helplessly into my own chair.

"'I do not think he will stay very long—he promised to return by eleven,' she said, timidly.

"I tried to realize the purport of it all. 'Gone to India? Gone! How? On a broomstick? Good Heavens,' I murmured, 'am I insane?'

"'Perfectly,' she said, 'and I am tired; you may take me back to the hotel.'

"I scarcely heard her; I was feebly attempting to gather up my numbed wits. Slowly I began to comprehend the situation, to review the startling and humiliating events of the day. At noon, in the court of the Hôtel St. Antoine, I had been annoyed by a man and a cat. I had retired to my own room and had slept until dinner. In the evening I met two tourists on the sea-wall promenade. I had been beguiled into conversation—yes, into intimacy with these two tourists! I had had the intention of embracing the faith of Pythagoras! Then I had mewed like a cat with all the strength of my lungs. Now the male tourist vanishes—and leaves me in charge of the female tourist, alone and at night in a strange city! And now the female tourist proposes that I take her home!

"With a remnant of self-possession I groped for my eye-glass, seized it, screwed it firmly into my eye, and looked long and earnestly at the girl. As I looked, my eyes softened, my monocle dropped, and I forgot everything in the beauty and purity of the face before me. My heart began to beat against my stiff, white waistcoat. Had I dared—yes, dared to think of this wondrous little beauty as a female tourist? Her pale, sweet face, turned towards the sea, seemed to cast a spell upon the night. How loud my heart was beating! The yellow moon floated, half dipping in the sea, flooding land and water with enchanted lights. Wind and wave seemed to feel the spell of her eyes, for the breeze died away, the heaving Scheldt tossed noiselessly, and the dark Dutch luggers swung idly on the tide with every sail adroop.

"A sudden hush fell over land and water, the voices on the promenade were stilled; little by little the shadowy throng, the terrace, the sea itself vanished, and I only saw her face, shadowed against the moon.

"It seemed as if I had drifted miles above the earth, through all space and eternity, and there was naught between me and high heaven but that white face. Ah, how I loved her! I knew it—I never doubted it. Could years of passionate adoration touch her heart—her little heart, now beating so calmly with no thought of love to startle it from its quiet and send it fluttering against the gentle breast? In her lap her clasped hands tightened—her eyelids drooped as though some pleasant thought was passing. I saw the color dye her temples, I saw the blue eyes turn, half frightened, to my own, I saw—and I knew she had read my thoughts. Then we both rose, side by side, and she was weeping softly, yet for my life I dared not speak. She turned away, touching her eyes with a bit of lace, and I sprang to her side and offered her my arm.

"'You cannot go back alone,' I said.

"She did not take my arm.

"'Do you hate me, Miss Wyeth?'

"'I am very tired,' she said; 'I must go home.'

"'You cannot go alone.'

"'I do not care to accept your escort.'

"'Then—you send me away?'

"'No,' she said, in a hard voice. 'You can come if you like.' So I humbly attended her to the Hôtel St. Antoine.

XXIV

As we reached the Place Verte and turned into the court of the hotel, the sound of the midnight bells swept over the city, and a horse-car jingled slowly by on its last trip to the railroad station.

"We passed the fountain, bubbling and splashing in the moonlit court, and, crossing the square, entered the southern wing of the hotel. At the foot of the stairway she leaned for an instant against the banisters.

"'I am afraid we have walked too fast,' I said.

"She turned to me coldly. 'No—conventionalities must be observed. You were quite right in escaping as soon as possible.'

"'But,' I protested, 'I assure you—'

"She gave a little movement of impatience. 'Don't,' she said, 'you tire me—conventionalities tire me. Be satisfied—nobody has seen you.'

"'You are cruel,' I said, in a low voice—'what do you think I care for conventionalities?'

"'You care everything—you care what people think, and you try to do what they say is good form. You never did such an original thing in your life as you have just done.'

"'You read my thoughts,' I exclaimed, bitterly. 'It is not fair—'

"'Fair or not, I know what you consider me—ill-bred, common, pleased with any sort of attention. Oh! why should I waste one word—one thought on you?'

"'Miss Wyeth—' I began, but she interrupted me.

"'Would you dare tell me what you think of me?—Would you dare tell me what you think of my father?'

"I was silent. She turned and mounted two steps of the stairway, then faced me again.

"'Do you think it was for my own pleasure that I permitted myself to be left alone with you? Do you imagine that I am flattered by your attention?—do you venture to think I ever could be? How dared you think what you did think there on the sea-wall?'

"'I cannot help my thoughts!' I replied.

"'You turned on me like a tiger when you awoke from your trance. Do you really suppose that you mewed? Are you not aware that my father hypnotized you?'

"'No—I did not know it,' I said. The hot blood tingled in my fingertips, and I looked angrily at her.

"'Why do you imagine that I waste my time on you?' she said. 'Your vanity has answered that question—now let your intelligence answer it. I am a Pythagorean; I have been chosen to bring in a convert, and you were the convert selected for me by the Mahatmas of the Consolidated Trust Company. I have followed you from New York to Antwerp, as I was bidden, but now my courage fails, and I shrink from fulfilling my mission, knowing you to be the type of man you are. If I could give it up—if I could only go away—never, never again to see you! Ah, I fear they will not permit it!—until my mission is accomplished. Why was I chosen—I, with a woman's heart and a woman's pride. I—I hate you!'

"'I love you,' I said, slowly.

"She paled and looked away.

"'Answer me,' I said.

"Her wide, blue eyes turned back again, and I held them with mine. At last she slowly drew a long-stemmed rose from the bunch at her belt, turned, and mounted the shadowy staircase. For a moment I thought I saw her pause on the landing above, but the moonlight was uncertain. After waiting for a long time in vain, I moved away, and in going raised my hand to my face, but I stopped short, and my heart stopped too, for a moment. In my hand I held a long-stemmed rose.

"With my brain in a whirl I crept across the court and mounted the stairs to my room. Hour after hour I walked the floor, slowly at first, then more rapidly, but it brought no calm to the fierce tumult of my thoughts, and at last I dropped into a chair before the empty fireplace, burying my head in my hands.

"Uncertain, shocked, and deadly weary, I tried to think—I strove to bring order out of the chaos in my brain, but I only sat staring at the long-stemmed rose. Slowly I began to take a vague pleasure in its heavy perfume, and once I crushed a leaf between my palms, and, bending over, drank in the fragrance.

"Twice my lamp flickered and went out, and twice, treading softly, I crossed the room to relight it. Twice I threw open the door, thinking that I heard some sound without. How close the air was!—how heavy and hot! And what was that strange, subtle odor which had insensibly filled the room? It grew stronger and more penetrating, and I began to dislike it, and to escape it I buried my nose in the half-opened rose. Horror! The odor came from the rose—and the rose itself was no longer a rose—not even a flower now—it was only a bunch of catnip; and I dashed it to the floor and ground it under my heel.

"'Mountebank!' I cried, in a rage. My anger grew cold—and I shivered, drawn perforce to the curtained window. Something was there, outside. I could not hear it, for it made no sound, but I knew it was there, watching me. What was it? The damp hair stirred on my head. I touched the heavy curtains. Whatever was outside them sprang up, tore at the window, and then rushed away.

"Feeling very shaky, I crept to the window, opened it, and leaned out. The night was calm. I heard the fountain splashing in the moonlight and the sea-winds soughing through the palms. Then I closed the window and turned back into the room; and as I stood there a sudden breeze, which could not have come from without, blew sharply in my face, extinguishing the candle and sending the long curtains bellying out into the room. The lamp on the table flashed and smoked and sputtered; the room was littered with flying papers and catnip leaves. Then the strange wind died away, and somewhere in the night a cat snarled.

"I turned desperately to my trunk and flung it open. Into it I threw everything I owned, pell-mell, closed the lid, locked it, and, seizing my mackintosh and travelling-bag, ran down the stairs, crossed the court, and entered the night-office of the hotel. There I called up the sleepy clerk, settled my reckoning, and sent a porter for a cab.

"'Now,' I said, 'what time does the next train leave?'

"'The next train for where?'

"'Anywhere!'

"The clerk locked the safe, and, carefully keeping the desk between himself and me, motioned the office-boy to look at the time-tables.

"'Next train, 2.10. Brussels—Paris,' read the boy.

"At that moment the cab rattled up by the curbstone, and I sprang in while the porter tossed my traps on top. Away we bumped over the stony pavement, past street after street lighted dimly by tall gas-lamps, and alley after alley brilliant with the glare of villainous all-night café-concerts, and then, turning, we rumbled past the Circus and the Eldorado, and at last stopped with a jolt before the Brussels station.

"I had not a moment to lose. 'Paris!' I cried—'first-class!' and, pocketing the book of coupons, hurried across the platform to where the Brussels train lay. A guard came running up, flung open the door of a first-class carriage, slammed and locked it after I had jumped in, and the long train glided from the arched station out into the starlit morning.

"I was all alone in the compartment. The wretched lamp in the roof flickered dimly, scarcely lighting the stuffy box. I could not see to read my time-table, so I wrapped my legs in the travelling-rug and lay back, staring out into the misty morning. Trees, walls, telegraph-poles flashed past, and the cinders drove in showers against the rattling windows. I slept at times, fitfully, and once, springing up, peered sharply at the opposite seat, possessed with the idea that somebody was there.

"When the train reached Brussels I was sound asleep, and the guard awoke me with difficulty.

"'Breakfast, sir?' he asked.

"'Anything,' I sighed, and stepped out to the platform, rubbing my legs and shivering. The other passengers were already breakfasting in the station café, and I joined them and managed to swallow a cup of coffee and a roll.

"The morning broke gray and cloudy, and I bundled myself into my mackintosh for a tramp along the platform. Up and down I stamped, puffing a cigar, and digging my hands deep in my pockets, while the other passengers huddled into the warmer compartments of the train or stood watching the luggage being lifted into the forward mail-carriage. The wait was very long; the hands of the great clock pointed to six, and still the train lay motionless along the platform. I approached a guard and asked him whether anything was wrong.

"'Accident on the line,' he replied; 'monsieur had better go to his compartment and try to sleep, for we may be delayed until noon.'

"I followed the guard's advice, and, crawling into my corner, wrapped myself in the rug and lay back watching the rain-drops spattering along the window-sill. At noon the train had not moved, and I lunched in the compartment. At four o'clock in the afternoon the station-master came hurrying along the platform, crying, 'Montez! montez! messieurs, s'il vous plaît'—and the train steamed out of the station and whirled away through the flat treeless Belgian plains. At times I dozed, but the shaking of the car always awoke me, and I would sit blinking out at the endless stretch of plain, until a sudden flurry of rain blotted the landscape from my eyes. At last a long, shrill whistle from the engine, a jolt, a series of bumps, and an apparition of red trousers and bayonets warned me that we had arrived at the French frontier. I turned out with the others, and opened my valise for inspection, but the customs officials merely chalked it, without examination, and I hurried back to my compartment amid the shouting of guards and the clanging of station bells. Again I found that I was alone in the compartment, so I smoked a cigarette, thanked Heaven, and fell into a dreamless sleep.

"How long I slept I do not know, but when I awoke the train was roaring through a tunnel. When again it flashed out into the open country I peered through the grimy, rain-stained window and saw that the storm had ceased and stars were twinkling in the sky. I stretched my legs, yawned, pushed my travelling-cap back from my forehead, and, stumbling to my feet, walked up and down the compartment until my cramped muscles were relieved. Then I sat down again, and, lighting a cigar, puffed great rings and clouds of fragrant smoke across the aisle.

"The train was flying; the cars lurched and shook, and the windows rattled accompaniment to the creaking panels. The smoke from my cigar dimmed the lamp in the ceiling and hid the opposite seat from view. How it curled and writhed in the corners, now eddying upward, now floating across the aisle like a veil! I lounged back in my cushioned seat, watching it with interest. What queer shapes it took! How thick it was becoming!—how strangely luminous! Now it had filled the whole compartment, puff after puff crowding upward, waving, wavering, clouding the windows, and blotting the lamp from sight. It was most interesting. I had never before smoked such a cigar. What an extraordinary brand! I examined the end, flicking the ashes away. The cigar was out. Fumbling for a match to relight it, my eyes fell on the drifting smoke-curtain which swayed across the corner opposite. It seemed almost tangible. How like a real curtain it hung, gray, impenetrable! A man might hide behind it. Then an idea came into my head, and it persisted until my uneasiness amounted to a vague terror. I tried to fight it off—I strove to resist—but the conviction slowly settled upon me that something was behind that smoke-veil—something which had entered the compartment while I slept.

"'It can't be,' I muttered, my eyes fixed on the misty drapery; 'the train has not stopped.'

"The car creaked and trembled. I sprang to my feet and swept my arm through the veil of smoke. Then my hair rose on my head. For my hand touched another hand, and my eyes had met two other eyes.

"I heard a voice in the gloom, low and sweet, calling me by name; I saw the eyes again, tender and blue; soft fingers touched my own.

"'Are you afraid?' she said.

"My heart began to beat again, and my face warmed with returning blood.

"'It is only I,' she said, gently.

"I seemed to hear my own voice speaking as if at a great distance, 'You here—alone?'

"'How cruel of you!' she faltered; 'I am not alone.' At the same instant my eyes fell upon the professor, calmly seated by the farther window. His hands were thrust into the folds of a corded and tasselled dressing-gown, from beneath which peeped two enormous feet encased in carpet slippers. Upon his head towered a yellow night-cap. He did not pay the slightest attention to either me or his daughter, and, except for the lighted cigar which he kept shifting between his lips, he might have been taken for a wax dummy.

"Then I began to speak, feebly, hesitating like a child.

"'How did you come into this compartment? You—you do not possess wings, I suppose? You could not have been here all the time. Will you explain—explain to me? See, I ask you very humbly, for I do not understand. This is the nineteenth century, and these things don't fit in. I'm wearing a Dunlap hat—I've got a copy of the New York *Herald* in my bag—President Roosevelt is alive, and everything is so very unromantic in the world! Is this real magic? Perhaps I'm filled with hallucinations. Perhaps I'm asleep and dreaming. Perhaps you are not really here—nor I—nor anybody, nor anything!'

"The train plunged into a tunnel, and when again it dashed out from the other end the cold wind blew furiously in my face from the farther window. It was wide open; the professor was gone.

"'Papa has changed to another compartment,' she said, quietly. 'I think perhaps you were beginning to bore him.'

"Her eyes met mine and she smiled.

"'Are you very much bewildered?'

"I looked at her in silence. She sat very quietly, her hands clasped above her knee, her curly hair glittering to her girdle. A long robe, almost silvery in the twilight, clung to her young figure; her bare feet were thrust deep into a pair of shimmering Eastern slippers.

"'When you fled,' she sighed, 'I was asleep and there was no time to lose. I barely had a moment to go to Bombay, to find papa, and return in time to join you. This is an East-Indian costume.'

"Still I was silent.

"'Are you shocked?' she asked, simply.

"'No,' I replied, in a dull voice. 'I'm past that.'

"'You are very rude,' she said, with the tears starting to her eyes.

"'I do not mean to be. I only wish to go away—away somewhere and find out what my name is.'

"'Your name is Harold Kensett.'

"'Are you sure?' I asked, eagerly.

"'Yes—what troubles you?'

"'Is everything plain to you? Are you a sort of prophet and second-sight medium? Is nothing hidden from you?' I asked.

"'Nothing,' she faltered. My head ached and I clasped it in my hand.

"A sudden change came over her. 'I am human—believe me!' she said, with piteous eagerness. 'Indeed, I do not seem strange to those who understand. You wonder, because you left me at midnight in Antwerp and you wake to find me here. If, because I find myself reincarnated, endowed with senses and capabilities which few at present possess—if I am so made, why should it seem strange? It is all so natural to me. If I appear to you—'

"'Appear?'

"'Yes—'

"'Wilhelmina!' I cried, 'can you vanish?'

"'Yes,' she murmured; 'does it seem to you unmaidenly?'

"'Great Heaven!' I groaned.

"'Don't!' she cried, with tears in her voice—'oh, please don't! Help me to bear it! If you only knew how awful it is to be different from other girls—how mortifying it is to me to be able to vanish—oh; how I hate and detest it all!'

"'Don't cry,' I said, looking at her pityingly.

"'Oh, dear me!' she sobbed. 'You shudder at the sight of me because I can vanish.'

"'I don't!' I cried.

"'Yes, you do! You abhor me—you shrink away! Oh, why did I ever see you?—why did you ever come into my life?—what have I done in ages past, that now, reborn, I suffer cruelly—cruelly?'

"'What do you mean?' I whispered. My voice trembled with happiness.

"'I?—nothing; but you think me a fabled monster.'

"'Wilhelmina—my sweet Wilhelmina,' I said, 'I don't think you a fabled monster. I love you; see—see—I am at your feet; listen to me, my darling—'

"She turned her blue eyes to mine. I saw tears sparkling on the curved lashes.

"'Wilhelmina, I love you,' I said again.

"Slowly she raised her hands to my head and held it a moment, looking at me strangely. Then her face grew nearer to my own, her glittering hair fell over my shoulders, her lips rested on mine.

"In that long, sweet kiss the beating of her heart answered mine, and I learned a thousand truths, wonderful, mysterious, splendid; but when our lips fell apart, the memory of what I learned departed also.

"'It was so very simple and beautiful,' she sighed, 'and I—I never saw it. But the Mahatmas knew—ah, they knew that my mission could only be accomplished through love.'

"'And it is,' I whispered, 'for you shall teach me—me, your husband.'

"'And—and you will not be impatient? You will try to believe?'

"'I will believe what you tell me, my sweetheart.'

"'Even about—cats?'

"Before I could reply the farther window opened and a yellow nightcap, followed by the professor, entered from somewhere without. Wilhelmina sank back on her sofa, but the professor needed not to be told, and we both knew he was already busily reading our thoughts.

"For a moment there was dead silence—long enough for the professor to grasp the full significance of what had passed. Then he uttered a single exclamation, 'Oh!'

"After a while, however, he looked at me for the first time that evening, saying, 'Congratulate you, Mr. Kensett, I'm sure,' tied several knots in the cord of his dressing-gown, lighted a cigar, and paid no further attention to either of us. Some moments later he opened the window again and disappeared. I looked across the aisle at Wilhelmina.

"'You may come over beside me,' she said, shyly.

XXV

It was nearly ten o'clock and our train was rapidly approaching Paris. We passed village after village wrapped in mist, station after station hung on with twinkling red and blue and yellow lanterns, then sped on again with the echo of the switch-bells ringing in our ears.

"When at length the train slowed up and stopped, I opened the window and looked out upon a long, wet platform, shining under the electric lights.

"A guard came running by, throwing open the doors of each compartment, and crying 'Paris next! Tickets, if you please.'

"I handed him my book of coupons, from which he tore several and handed it back. Then he lifted his lantern and peered into the compartment, saying, 'Is monsieur alone?'

"I turned to Wilhelmina.

"'He wants your ticket—give it to me.'

"'What's that?' demanded the guard.

"I looked anxiously at Wilhelmina.

"'If your father has the tickets—' I began, but was interrupted by the guard, who snapped:

"'Monsieur will give himself the trouble to remember that I do not understand English.'

"'Keep quiet!' I said, sharply, in French. 'I am not speaking to you.'

"'The guard stared stupidly at me, then at my luggage, and finally, entering the car, knelt down and peered under the seats. Presently he got up, very red in the face, and went out slamming the door. He had not paid the slightest attention to Wilhelmina, but I distinctly heard him say, 'Only Englishmen and idiots talk to themselves!'

"'Wilhelmina,' I faltered, 'do you mean to say that that guard could not see you?'

"She began to look so serious again that I merely added, 'Never mind, I don't care whether you are invisible or not, dearest.'

"'I am not invisible to you,' she said; 'why should you care?'

"A great noise of bells and whistles drowned our voices, and, amid the whirring of switch-bells, the hissing of steam, and the cries of 'Paris! All out!' our train glided into the station.

"It was the professor who opened the door of our carriage. There he stood, calmly adjusting his yellow night-cap and drawing the dressing-gown closer with the corded tassels.

"'Where have you been?' I asked.

"'On the engine.'

"'*In* the engine, I suppose you mean,' I said.

"'No, I don't; I mean *on* the engine—on the pilot. It was very refreshing. Where are we going now?'

"'Do you know Paris?' asked Wilhelmina, turning to me.

"'Yes. I think your father had better take you to the Hôtel Normandie on the Rue de l'Échelle—'

"'But you must stay there, too!'

"'Of course—if you wish—'

"She laughed nervously.

"'Don't you see that my father and I could not take rooms—now? You must engage three rooms for yourself.'

"'Why?' I asked, stupidly.

"'Oh, dear—why, because we are invisible.'

"I tried to repress a shudder. The professor gave Wilhelmina his arm, and, as I studied his ensemble, I thanked Heaven that he was invisible.

"At the gate of the station I hailed a four-seated cab, and we rattled away through the stony streets, brilliant with gas-jets, and in a few moments rolled smoothly across the Avenue de l'Opéra, turned into the Rue de l'Échelle, and stopped. A bright little page, all over buttons, came out, took my luggage, and preceded us into the hallway.

"I, with Wilhelmina on my arm and the professor shuffling along beside me, walked over to the desk.

"'Room?' said the clerk. 'We have a very desirable room on the second, fronting the Rue St. Honoré—'

"'But we—that is, I want three rooms—three separate rooms!' I said.

"The clerk scratched his chin. 'Monsieur is expecting friends?'

"'Say yes,' whispered Wilhelmina, with a suspicion of laughter in her voice.

"'Yes,' I repeated, feebly.

"'Gentlemen, of course?' said the clerk, looking at me narrowly.

"'One lady.'

"'Married, of course?'

"'What's that to you?' I said, sharply. 'What do you mean by speaking to us—'

"'Us?'

"'I mean to me,' I said, badly rattled; 'give me the rooms and let me get to bed, will you?'

"'Monsieur will remember,' said the clerk, coldly, 'that this is an old and respectable hotel.'

"'I know it,' I said, smothering my rage.

"The clerk eyed me suspiciously.

"'Front!' he called, with irritating deliberation. 'Show this gentleman to apartment ten.'

"'How many rooms are there!' I demanded.

"'Three sleeping-rooms and a parlor.'

"'I will take it,' I said, with composure.

"'On probation,' muttered the clerk, insolently.

"'Swallowing the insult, I followed the bell-boy up the stairs, keeping between him and Wilhelmina, for I dreaded to see him walk through her as if she were thin air. A trim maid rose to meet us and conducted us through a hallway into a large apartment. She threw open all the bedroom-doors and said, 'Will monsieur have the goodness to choose?'

"'Which will you take,' I began, turning to Wilhelmina.

"'I? Monsieur!' cried the startled maid.

"That completely upset me. 'Here,' I muttered, slipping some silver into her hand; 'now, for the love of Heaven, run away!'

"When she had vanished with a doubtful 'Merci, monsieur!' I handed the professor the keys and asked him to settle the thing with Wilhelmina.

"Wilhelmina took the corner room, the professor rambled into the next one, and I said good-night and crept wearily into my own chamber. I sat down and tried to think. A great feeling of fatigue weighted my spirits.

"'I can think better with my clothes off,' I said, and slipped the coat from my shoulders. How tired I was! 'I can think better in bed,' I muttered, slinging my cravat on the dresser and tossing my shirt-studs after it. I was certainly very tired. 'No,' I yawned, grasping the pillow and drawing it under my head—'now I can think a bit.' But before my head fell on the pillow sleep closed my eyes.

"I began to dream at once. It seemed as though my eyes were wide open and the professor was standing beside my bed.

"'Young man,' he said, 'you've won my daughter and you must pay the piper!'

"'What piper?' I said.

"'The Pied Piper of Hamelin, I don't think,' replied the professor, vulgarly, and before I could realize what he was doing he had drawn a reed pipe from his dressing-gown and was playing a strangely annoying air. Then an awful thing occurred. Cats began to troop into the room, cats by the hundred—toms and tabbies, gray, yellow, Maltese, Persian, Manx—all purring and all marching round and round, rubbing against the furniture, the professor, and even against me. I struggled with the nightmare.

"'Take them away!' I tried to gasp.

"'Nonsense!' he said; 'here is an old friend.'

"I saw the white tabby cat of the Hôtel St. Antoine.

"'An old friend,' he repeated, and played a dismal melody on his reed.

"I saw Wilhelmina enter the room, lift the white tabby in her arms, and bring her to my side.

"'Shake hands with him,' she commanded.

"To my horror the tabby deliberately extended a paw and tapped me on the knuckles.

"'Oh!' I cried, in agony; 'this is a horrible dream! Why, oh, why can't I wake!'

"'Yes,' she said, dropping the cat, 'it is partly a dream, but some of it is real. Remember what I say, my darling; you are to go to-morrow morning and meet the twelve-o'clock train from Antwerp at the Gare du Nord. Papa and I are coming to Paris on that train. Don't you know that we are not really here now, you silly body? Good-night, then. I shall be very glad to see you.'

"I saw her glide from the room, followed by the professor, playing a gay quick-step, to which the cats danced two and two.

"'Good-night, sir,' said each cat as it passed my bed; and I dreamed no more.

"When I awoke, the room, the bed had vanished; I was in the street, walking rapidly; the sun shone down on the broad, white pavements of Paris, and the streams of busy life flowed past me on either side. How swiftly I was walking! Where the devil was I going? Surely I had business somewhere that needed immediate attention. I tried to remember when I had awakened, but I could not. I wondered where I had dressed myself; I had apparently taken great pains with my toilet, for I was immaculate, monocle and all, even down to a long-stemmed rose nestling in my button-hole. I knew Paris and recognized the streets through which I was hurrying. Where could I be going? What was my hurry? I glanced at my watch and found I had not a moment to lose. Then, as the bells of the city rang out mid-day, I hastened into the railroad station on the Rue Lafayette and walked out to the platform. And as I looked down the glittering track, around the distant curve shot a locomotive followed by a long line of cars. Nearer and nearer it came, while the station-gongs sounded and the switch-bells began ringing all along the track.

"'Antwerp express!' cried the sous-chef de gare, and as the train slipped along the tiled platform I sprang upon the steps of a first-class carriage and threw open the door.

"'How do you do, Mr. Kensett?' said Wilhelmina Wyeth, springing lightly to the platform. 'Really it is very nice of you to come to the train.' At the same moment a bald, mild-eyed gentleman emerged from the depths of the same compartment, carrying a large, covered basket.

"'How are you, Kensett?' he said. 'Glad to see you again. Rather warm in that compartment—no, I will not trust this basket to an expressman; give Wilhelmina your arm and I'll follow. We go to the Normandie, I believe?'

"All the morning I had Wilhelmina to myself, and at dinner I sat beside her, with the professor opposite. The latter was cheerful enough, but he nearly ruined my appetite, for he smelled strongly of catnip. After dinner he became restless and fidgeted about in his chair until coffee was brought, and we went up to the parlor of our apartment. Here his restlessness increased to such an extent that I ventured to ask him if he was in good health.

"It's that basket—the covered basket which I have in the next room,' he said.

"'What's the trouble with the basket?' I asked.

"'The basket's all right—but the contents worry me.'

"'May I inquire what the contents are?' I ventured.

"The professor rose.

"'Yes,' he said, 'you may inquire of my daughter.' He left the room, but reappeared shortly, carrying a saucer of milk.

"I watched him enter the next room, which was mine.

"'What on earth is he taking that into my room for?' I asked Wilhelmina. 'I don't keep cats.'

"'But you will,' she said.

"'I? Never!'

"'You will if I ask you to.'

"'But—but you won't ask me.'

"'But I do.'

""Wilhelmina!'

"'Harold!'

"'I detest cats.'

"'You must not.'

"'I can't help it.'

"'You will when I ask it. Have I not given myself to you? Will you not make a little sacrifice for me?'

"'I don't understand—'

"'Would you refuse my first request?'

"'No,' I said, miserably, 'I will keep dozens of cats—'

"'I do not ask that; I only wish you to keep one.'

"'Was that what your father had in that basket?' I asked, suspiciously.

"'Yes, the basket came from Antwerp.'

"'What! The white Antwerp cat!' I cried.

"'Yes.'

"'And you ask me to keep that cat? Oh, Wilhelmina!'

"'Listen!' she said. 'I have a long story to tell you; come nearer, close to me. You say you love me?'

"I bent and kissed her.

"'Then I shall put you to the proof,' she murmured.

"'Prove me!'

"'Listen. That cat is the same cat that ran out of the apartment in the Waldorf when your great-aunt ceased to exist—in human shape. My father and myself, having received word from the Mahatmas of the Trust Company, sheltered and cherished the cat. We were ordered by the Mahatmas to convert you. The task was appalling—but there is no such thing as refusing a command, and we laid our plans. That man with a white spot in his hair was my father—'

"'What! Your father is bald.'

"'He wore a wig then. The white spot came from dropping chemicals on the wig while experimenting with a substance which you could not comprehend.'

"'Then—then that clew was useless; but who could have taken the Crimson Diamond? And who was the man with the white spot on his head who tried to sell the stone in Paris?'

"'That was my father.'

"'He—he—st—took the Crimson Diamond!' I cried, aghast.

"'Yes and no. That was only a paste stone that he had in Paris. It was to draw you over here. He had the real Crimson Diamond also.'

"'Your father?'

"'Yes. He has it in the next room now. Can you not see how it disappeared, Harold? Why, the cat swallowed it!'

"'Do you mean to say that the white tabby swallowed the Crimson Diamond?'

"'By mistake. She tried to get it out of the velvet bag, and, as the bag was also full of catnip, she could not resist a mouthful, and unfortunately just then you broke in the door and so startled the cat that she swallowed the Crimson Diamond.'

"There was a painful pause. At last I said:

"'Wilhelmina, as you are able to vanish, I suppose that you also are able to converse with cats.'

"'I am,' she replied, trying to keep back the tears of mortification.

"'And that cat told you this?'

"'She did.'

"'And my Crimson Diamond is inside that cat?'

"'It is.'

"'Then,' said I, firmly, 'I am going to chloroform the cat.'

"'Harold!' she cried, in terror, 'that cat is your great-aunt!'

"I don't know to this day how I stood the shock of that announcement, or how I managed to listen while Wilhelmina tried to explain the transmigration theory, but it was all Chinese to me. I only knew that I was a blood relation of a cat, and the thought nearly drove me mad.

"'Try, my darling, try to love her,' whispered Wilhelmina; 'she must be very precious to you—'

"'Yes, with my diamond inside her,' I replied, faintly.

"'You must not neglect her,' said Wilhelmina.

"'Oh no, I'll always have my eye on her—I mean I will surround her with luxury—er, milk and bones and catnip and books—er—does she read?'

"'Not the books that human beings read. Now, go and speak to your aunt, Harold.'

"'Eh! How the deuce—'

"'Go; for my sake try to be cordial.'

"She rose and led me unresistingly to the door of my room.

"'Good Heavens!' I groaned; 'this is awful.'

"'Courage, my darling!' she whispered. 'Be brave for love of me.'

"I drew her to me and kissed her. Beads of cold perspiration started in the roots of my hair, but I clenched my teeth and entered the room alone. The room was dark and I stood silent, not knowing where to turn, fearful lest I step on my aunt! Then, through the dreary silence, I called, 'Aunty!'

"A faint noise broke upon my ear, and my heart grew sick, but I strode into the darkness, calling, hoarsely:

"'Aunt Tabby! It is your nephew!'

"Again the faint sound. Something was stirring there among the shadows—a shape moving softly along the wall, a shade which glided by me, paused, wavered, and darted under the bed. Then I threw myself on the floor, profoundly moved, begging, imploring my aunt to come to me.

"'Aunty! Aunty!' I murmured. 'Your nephew is waiting to take you to his heart!'

"At last I saw my great-aunt's eyes shining in the dark."

The young man's voice grew hushed and solemn, and he lifted his hand in silence:

"Close the door. That meeting is not for the eyes of the world! Close the door upon that sacred scene where great-aunt and nephew are united at last."

* * *

A long pause followed; deep emotion was visible in Miss Barrison's sensitive face. She said:

"Then—you are married?"

"No," replied Mr. Kensett, in a mortified voice.

"Why not?" I asked, amazed.

"Because," he said, "although my fianceé was prepared to accept a cat as her great-aunt, she could not endure the complications that followed."

"What complications?" inquired Miss Barrison.

The young man sighed profoundly, shaking his head.

"My great-aunt had kittens," he said, softly.

* * *

The tremendous scientific importance of these experiences excited me beyond measure. The simplicity of the narrative, the elaborate attention to corroborative detail, all bore irresistible testimony to the truth of these accounts of phenomena vitally important to the entire world of science.

We all dined together that night—a little earnest company of knowledge-seekers in the vast wilderness of the unexplored; and we lingered long in the dining-car, propounding questions, advancing theories, speculating upon possibilities of most intense interest. Never before had I known a man whose relatives were cats and kittens, but he did not appear to share my enthusiasm in the matter.

"You see," he said, looking at Miss Barrison, "it may be interesting from a purely scientific point of view, but it has already proved a bar to my marrying."

"Were the kittens black?" I inquired.

"No," he said, "my aunt drew the color-line, I am proud to say."

"I don't see," said Miss Barrison, "why the fact that your great-aunt is a cat should prevent you from marrying."

"It wouldn't prevent *me*!" said the young man, quickly.

"Nor me," mused Miss Barrison—"if I were really in love."

Meanwhile I had been very busy thinking about Professor Farrago, and, coming to an interesting theory, advanced it.

"If," I began, "he marries one of those transparent ladies, what about the children?"

"Some would be, no doubt, transparent," said Kensett.

"They might be only translucent," suggest Miss Barrison.

"Or partially opaque," I ventured. "But it's a risky marriage—not to be able to see what one's wife is about—"

"That is a silly reflection on women," said Miss Barrison, quietly. "Besides, a girl need not be transparent to conceal what's she's doing."

This observation seemed to end our postprandial and tripartite conference; Miss Barrison retired to her stateroom presently; after a last cigar, smoked almost in silence, the young man and I bade each other a civil good-night and retired to our respective berths.

I think it was at Richmond, Virginia, that I was awakened by the negro porter shaking me very gently and repeating, in a pleasant, monotonous voice:

"Teleg'am fo you, suh! Teleg'am foh Mistuh Gilland, suh. Done call you 'lev'm times sense breakfass, suh! Las' call foh luncheon, suh. Teleg'am foh—"

"Heavens!" I muttered, sitting up in my bunk, "is it as late as that! Where are we?" I slid up the window-shade and sat blinking at a flood of sunshine.

"Telegram?" I said, yawning and rubbing my eyes. "Let me have it. All right, I'll be out presently. Shut that curtain! I don't want the entire car to criticise my pink pajamas!"

"Ain' nobody in de cyar, 'scusin yo'se'f, suh," grinned the porter, retiring.

I heard him, but did not comprehend, sitting there sleepily unfolding the scrawled telegram. Suddenly my eyes flew wide open; I scanned the despatch with stunned incredulity:

> "ATLANTA, GEORGIA.
>
> "We couldn't help it. Love at first sight. Married this morning in Atlanta. Wildly happy. Forgive. Wire blessing.
>
> "(Signed) HAROLD KENSETT,
> "HELEN BARRISON KENSETT."

"Porter!" I shouted. "Porter! Help!"

There was no response.

"Oh, Lord!" I groaned, and rolled over, burying my head in the blankets; for I understood at last that Science, the most jealous, most exacting of mistresses, could never brook a rival. ❋

The Tracer of Lost Persons

TO

MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM A. HALL

The Tracer of Lost Persons

(excerpt)

CHAPTER 17 439

CHAPTER 18 445

CHAPTER 19 452

CHAPTER 20 460

Book Publication 1906

The Tracer of Lost Persons

For the harmony of the world, like that of a harp, is made up of discords.

-HERACLITUS.

XVII

On the thirteenth day of March, 1906, Kerns received the following cable from an old friend:

> "Is there anybody in New York who can find two criminals for me? I don't want to call in the police.
>
> "J. T. BURKE."

To which Kerns replied promptly:

> "Wire Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons, N.Y."

And a day or two later, being on his honeymoon, he forgot all about his old friend Jack Burke.

On the fifteenth day of March, 1906, Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons, received the following cablegram from Alexandria, Egypt:

> "*Keen, Tracer, New York:*—Locate Joram Smiles, forty, stout, lame, red hair, ragged red mustache, cast in left eye, pallid skin; carries one crutch; supposed to have arrived in America per S.S. *Scythian Queen*, with man known as Emanuel Gandon, swarthy, short, fat, light bluish eyes, Eurasian type.
>
> "I will call on you at your office as soon as my steamer, *Empress of Babylon*, arrives. If you discover my men, keep them under surveillance, but on no account call in police. Spare no expense. Dundas, Gray & Co. are my bankers and reference.
>
> "JOHN TEMPLETON BURKE."

On Monday, April 2d, a few minutes after eight o'clock in the morning, the card of Mr. John Templeton Burke was brought to Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons, and a moment later a well-built, wiry, sun-scorched young man was ushered into Mr. Keen's private office by a stenographer prepared to take minutes of the interview.

The first thing that the Tracer of Lost Persons noted in his visitor was his mouth; the next his eyes. Both were unmistakably good—the eyes which his Creator had given him looked people squarely in the face at every word; the mouth, which a man's own character fashions agreeably or mars, was pleasant, but firm when the trace of the smile lurking in the corners died out.

There were dozens of other external characteristics which Mr. Keen always looked for in his clients; and now the rapid exchange of preliminary glances appeared to satisfy both men, for they advanced toward each other and exchanged a formal hand clasp.

"Have you any news for me?" asked Burke.

"I have," said the Tracer. "There are cigars on the table beside you—matches in that silver case. No, I never smoke; but I like the aroma—and I like to watch men smoke. Do you know, Mr. Burke, that no two men smoke in the same fashion? There is as much character in the manner of holding a cigar as there is difference in the technic of artists."

Burke nodded, amused, but, catching sight of the busy stenographer, his bronzed features became serious, and he looked at Mr. Keen inquiringly.

"It is my custom," said the Tracer. "Do you object to my stenographer?"

Burke looked at the slim young girl in her black gown and white collar and cuffs. Then, very simply, he asked her pardon for objecting to her presence, but said that he could not discuss his case if she remained. So she rose, with a humorous glance at Mr. Keen; and the two men stood up until she had vanished, then reseated themselves *vis-à-vis*. Mr. Keen calmly dropped his elbow on the concealed button which prepared a hidden phonograph for the reception of every word that passed between them.

"What news have you for me, Mr. Keen?" asked the younger man with that same directness which the Tracer had already been prepared for, and which only corroborated the frankness of eyes and voice.

"My news is brief," he said. "I have both your men under observation."

"Already?" exclaimed Burke, plainly unprepared. "Do you actually mean that I can see these men whenever I desire to do so? Are these scoundrels in this town—within pistol shot?"

His youthful face hardened as he snapped out his last word, like the crack of a whip.

"I don't know how far your pistol carries," said Mr. Keen. "Do you wish to swear out a warrant?"

"No, I do not. I merely wish their addresses. You have not used the police in this matter, have you, Mr. Keen?"

"No. Your cable was explicit," said the Tracer. "Had you permitted me to use the police it would have been much less expensive for you."

"I can't help that," said the young man. "Besides, in a matter of this sort, a man cannot decently consider expense."

"A matter of what sort?" asked the Tracer blandly.

"Of *this* sort."

"Oh! Yet even now I do not understand. You must remember, Mr. Burke, that you have not told me anything concerning the reasons for your quest of these two men, Joram Smiles and Emanuel Gandon. Besides, this is the first time you have mentioned pistol range."

Burke, smoking steadily, looked at the Tracer through the blue fog of his cigar.

"No," he said, "I have not told you anything about them."

Mr. Keen waited a moment; then, smiling quietly to himself, he wrote down the present addresses of Joram Smiles and Emanuel Gandon, and, tearing off the leaf, handed it to the younger man, saying: "I omit the pistol range, Mr. Burke."

"I am very grateful to you," said Burke. "The efficiency of your system is too famous for me to venture to praise it. All I can say is 'Thank you'; all I can do in gratitude is to write my check—if you will be kind enough to suggest the figures."

"Are you sure that my services are ended?"

"Thank you, quite sure."

So the Tracer of Lost Persons named the figures, and his client produced a check book and filled in a check for the amount. This was presented and received with pleasant formality. Burke rose, prepared to take his leave, but the Tracer was apparently busy with the combination lock of a safe, and the young man lingered a moment to make his adieus.

As he stood waiting for the Tracer to turn around he studied the writing on the sheet of paper which he held toward the light:

> Joram Smiles, no profession, 613 West 24th Street.
> Emanuel Gandon, no profession, same address.
> Very dangerous men.

It occurred to him that these three lines of pencil-writing had cost him a thousand dollars—and at the same instant he flushed with shame at the idea of measuring the money value of anything in such a quest as this.

And yet—and yet he had already spent a great deal of money in his brief quest, and—*was* he any nearer the goal—even with the penciled addresses of these two men in his possession? Even with these men almost within pistol shot!

Pondering there, immersed in frowning retrospection, the room, the Tracer, the city seemed to fade from his view. He saw the red sand blowing in the desert; he heard the sickly squealing of camels at the El Teb Wells; he saw the sun strike fire from the rippling waters of Saïs; he saw the plain, and the ruins high above it; and the odor of the Long Bazaar smote him like a blow, and he heard the far call to prayer from the minarets of Sa-el-Hagar, once Saïs, the mysterious—Saïs of the million lanterns, Saïs of that splendid festival where the Great Triad's worship swayed dynasty after dynasty, and where, through the hot centuries, Isis, veiled, impassive, looked out upon the hundredth king of kings, Meris, the Builder of Gardens, dragged dead at the chariot of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Slowly the visions faded; into his remote eyes crept the consciousness of the twentieth century again; he heard the river whistles blowing, and the far dissonance of the streets—that iron undertone vibrating through the metropolis of the West from river to river and from the Palisades to the sea.

His gaze wandered about the room, from telephone desk to bookcase, from the table to the huge steel safe, door ajar, swung outward like the polished breech of a twelve-inch gun.

Then his vacant eyes met the eyes of the Tracer of Lost Persons, almost helplessly. And for the first time the full significance of this quest he had undertaken came over him like despair—this strange, hopeless, fantastic quest, blindly, savagely pursued from the sand wastes of Saïs to the wastes of this vast arid city of iron and masonry, ringing to the sky with the menacing clamor of its five monstrous boroughs.

Curiously weary of a sudden, he sat down, resting his head on one hand. The Tracer watched him, bent partly over his desk. From moment to moment he tore minute pieces from the blotter, or drew imaginary circles and arabesques on his pad with an inkless pen.

"Perhaps I could help you, after all—if you'd let me try," he said quietly.

"Do you mean—*me*?" asked Burke, without raising his head.

"If you like—yes, you—or any man in trouble—in perplexity—in the uncertain deductions which arise from an attempt at self-analysis."

"It is true; I am trying to analyze myself. I believe that I don't know how. All has been mere impulse—so far. No, I don't know how to analyze it all."

"I do," said the Tracer.

Burke raised his level, unbelieving eyes.

"You are in love," said the Tracer.

After a long time Burke looked up again. "Do you think so?"

"Yes. Can I help you?" asked the Tracer pleasantly.

The young man sat silent, frowning into space; then:

"I tell you plainly enough that I have come here to argue with two men at the end of a pistol; and—you tell me I'm in love. By what logic—"

"It is written in your face, Mr. Burke—in your eyes, in every feature, every muscle's contraction, every modulation of your voice. My tables, containing six hundred classified superficial phenomena peculiar to all human emotions, have been compiled and scientifically arranged according to Bertillon's system. It is an absolutely accurate key to every phase of human emotion, from hate, through all its amazingly paradoxical phenomena, to love, with all its genera under the suborder—all its species, subspecies, and varieties."

He leaned back, surveying the young man with kindly amusement.

"You talk of pistol range, but you are thinking of something more fatal than bullets, Mr. Burke. You are thinking of love—of the first, great, absorbing, unreasoning passion that has ever shaken you, blinded you, seized you and dragged you out of the ordered path of life, to push you violently into the strange and unexplored! That is what stares out on the world through those haunted eyes of yours, when the smile dies out and you are off your guard; that is what is hardening those flat, clean bands of muscle in jaw and cheek; that is what those hints of shadow mean beneath the eye, that new and delicate pinch to the nostril, that refining, almost to sharpness, of the nose, that sensitive edging to the lips, and the lean delicacy of the chin."

He bent slightly forward in his chair.

"There is all that there, Mr. Burke, and something else—the glimmering dawn of desperation."

"Yes,"said the other, "that is there. I am desperate."

"*Ex*actly. Also you wear two revolvers in a light, leather harness strapped up under your armpits," said the Tracer, laughing. "Take them off, Mr. Burke. There is nothing to be gained in shooting up Mr. Smiles or converting Mr. Gandon into nitrates.

"If it is a matter where one man can help another," the Tracer added simply, "it would give me pleasure to place my resources at your command—without recompense—"

"Mr. Keen!" said Burke, astonished.

"Yes?"

"You are very amiable; I had not wished—had not expected anything except professional interest from you."

"Why not? I like you, Mr. Burke."

The utter disarming candor of this quiet, elderly gentleman silenced the younger man with a suddenness born of emotions long crushed, long relentlessly mastered, and which now, in revolt, shook him fiercely in every fiber. All at once he felt very young, very helpless in the world—that same world through which, until within a few weeks, he had roved so confidently, so arrogantly, challenging man and the gods themselves in the pride of his strength and youth.

But now, halting, bewildered, lost amid the strange maze of byways whither impulse had lured and abandoned him, he looked out into a world of wilderness and unfamiliar stars and shadow shapes undreamed of, and he knew not which way to turn—not even how to return along the ways his impetuous feet had trodden in this strange and hopeless quest of his.

"How can you help me?" he said bluntly, while the quivering undertone rang in spite of him. "Yes, I am in love; but how can any living man help me?"

"Are you in love with the dead?" asked the Tracer gravely. "For that only is hopeless. Are you in love with one who is not living?"

"Yes."

"You love one whom you know to be dead?"

"Yes; dead."

"How do you know that she is dead?"

"That is not the question. I knew that when I fell in love with her. It is not that which appals me; I ask nothing more than to live my life out loving the dead. I—I ask very little."

He passed his unsteady hand across his dry lips, across his eyes and forehead, then laid his clenched fist on the table.

"Some men remain constant to a memory; some to a picture—sane, wholesome, normal men. Some men, with a fixed ideal, never encounter its facsimile, and so never love. There is nothing strange, after all, in this; nothing abnormal, nothing unwholesome. Grünwald loved the marble head and shoulders of the lovely Amazon in the Munich Museum; he died unmarried, leaving the charities and good deeds of a blameless life to justify him. Sir Henry Guest, the great surgeon who worked among the poor without recompense, loved Gainsborough's 'Lady Wilton.' The portrait hangs above his tomb in St. Clement's Hundreds. D'Epernay loved Mlle. Jeanne Vacaresco, who died before he was born. And I—I love in my own fashion."

His low voice rang with the repressed undertone of excitement; he opened and closed his clinched hand as though controlling the lever of his emotions.

"What can you do for a man who loves the shadow of Life?" he asked.

"If you love the shadow because the substance has passed away—if you love the soul because the dust has returned to the earth as it was—"

"It has *not!*" said the younger man.

The Tracer said very gravely: "It is written that whenever 'the Silver Cord' is loosed, 'then shall the dust return unto the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto Him who gave it.'"

"The spirit—yes; *that* has taken its splendid flight—"

His voice choked up, died out; he strove to speak again, but could not. The Tracer let him alone, and bent again over his desk, drawing imaginary circles on the stained blotter, while moment after moment passed under the tension of that fiercest of all struggles, when a man sits throttling his own soul into silence.

And, after a long time, Burke lifted a haggard face from the cradle of his crossed arms and shook his shoulders, drawing a deep, steady breath.

"Listen to *me!*" he said in an altered voice.

And the Tracer of Lost Persons nodded.

XVIII

When I left the Point I was assigned to the colored cavalry. They are good men; we went up Kettle Hill together. Then came the Philippine troubles, then that Chinese affair. Then I did staff duty, and could not stand the inactivity and resigned. They had no use for me in Manchuria; I tired of waiting, and went to Venezuela. The prospects for service there were absurd; I heard of the Moorish troubles and went to Morocco. Others of my sort swarmed there; matters dragged and dragged, and the Kaiser never meant business, anyway.

"Being independent, and my means permitting me, I got some shooting in the back country. This all degenerated into the merest nomadic wandering—nothing but sand, camels, ruins, tents, white walls, and blue skies. And at last I came to the town of Sa-el-Hagar."

His voice died out; his restless, haunted eyes became fixed.

"Sa-el-Hagar, once ancient Saïs," repeated the Tracer quietly; and the young man looked at him.

"You know *that?"*

"Yes," said the Tracer.

For a while Burke remained silent, preoccupied, then, resting his chin on his hand and speaking in a curiously monotonous voice, as though repeating to himself by rote, he went on:

"The town is on the heights—have you a pencil? Thank you. Here is the town of Sa-el-Hagar, here are the ruins, here is the wall, and somewhere hereabouts should be the buried temple of Neith, which nobody has found." He shifted his pencil. "Here is the lake of Saïs; here, standing all alone on the plain, are those great monolithic pillars stretching away into perspective—four hundred of them in all—a hundred and nine still upright. There were one hundred and ten when I arrived at El Teb Wells."

He looked across at the Tracer, repeating: "One hundred and ten—when I arrived. One fell the first night—a distant pillar far away on the horizon. Four thousand years had it stood there. And it fell—the first night of my arrival. I heard it; the nights are cold at El Teb Wells, and I was lying awake, all a-shiver, counting the stars to make me sleep. And very, very far away in the desert I heard and felt the shock of its fall—the fall of forty centuries under the Egyptian stars."

His eyes grew dreamy; a slight glow had stained his face.

"Did you ever halt suddenly in the Northern forests, listening, as though a distant voice had hailed you? Then you understand why that far, dull sound from the dark horizon brought me to my feet, bewildered, listening, as though my own name had been spoken.

"I heard the wind in the tents and the stir of camels; I heard the reeds whispering on Saïs Lake and the yap-yap of a shivering jackal; and always, always, the hushed echo in my ears of my own name called across the starlit waste.

"At dawn I had forgotten. An Arab told me that a pillar had fallen; it was all the same to me, to him, to the others, too. The sun came out hot. I like heat. My men sprawled in the tents; some watered, some went up to the town to gossip in the bazaar. I mounted and cast bridle on neck—you see how much I cared where I went! In two hours we had completed a circle—like a ruddy hawk above El Teb. And my horse halted beside the fallen pillar."

As he spoke his language had become very simple, very direct, almost without accent, and he spoke slowly, picking his way with that lack of inflection, of emotion characteristic of a child reading a new reader.

"The column had fallen from its base, eastward, and with its base it had upheaved another buried base, laying bare a sort of cellar and a flight of stone steps descending into darkness.

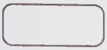
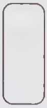
"Into this excavation the sand was still running in tiny rivulets. Listening, I could hear it pattering far, far down into the shadows.

"Sitting there in the saddle, the thing explained itself as I looked. The fallen pillar had been built upon older ruins; all Egypt is that way, ruin founded on the ruin of ruins—like human hopes.

"The stone steps, descending into the shadow of remote ages, invited me. I dismounted, walked to the edge of the excavation, and, kneeling, peered downward. And I saw a wall and the lotus-carved rim of a vast stone-framed pool; and as I looked I heard the tinkle of water. For the pillar, falling, had unbottled the ancient spring, and now the stone-framed lagoon was slowly filling after its drought of centuries.

"There was light enough to see by, but, not knowing how far I might penetrate, I returned to my horse, pocketed matches and candles from the saddlebags, and, returning, started straight down the steps of stone.

"Fountain, wall, lagoon, steps, terraces half buried—all showed what the place had been: a water garden of ancient Egypt—probably royal—because, although I am not able to decipher hieroglyphics, I have heard somewhere that these picture inscriptions, when inclosed in a cartouche like this"—he drew rapidly—

 “or this 

indicate that the subject of the inscription was once a king.

“And on every wall, every column, I saw the insignia of ancient royalty, and I saw strange hawk-headed figures bearing symbols engraved on stone—beasts, birds, fishes, unknown signs and symbols; and everywhere the lotus carved in stone—the bud, the blossom half-inclosed, the perfect flower.”

His dreamy eyes met the gaze of the Tracer, unseeing; he rested his sunburned face between both palms, speaking in the same vague monotone:

“Everywhere dust, ashes, decay, the death of life, the utter annihilation of the living—save only the sparkle of reborn waters slowly covering the baked bed of the stone-edged pool—strange, luminous water, lacking the vital sky tint, enameled with a film of dust, yet, for all that, quickening with imprisoned brilliancy like an opal.

“The slow filling of the pool fascinated me; I stood I know not how long watching the thin film of water spreading away into the dimness beyond. At last I turned and passed curiously along the wall where, at its base, mounds of dust marked what may have been trees. Into these I probed with my riding crop, but discovered nothing except the depths of the dust.

“When I had penetrated the ghost of this ancient garden for a thousand yards the light from the opening was no longer of any service. I lighted a candle; and its yellow rays fell upon a square portal into which led another flight of steps. And I went down.

“There were eighteen steps descending into a square stone room. Strange gleams and glimmers from wall and ceiling flashed dimly in my eyes under the wavering flame of the candle. Then the flame grew still—still as death—and Death lay at my feet—there on the stone floor—a man, square shouldered, hairless, the cobwebs of his tunic mantling him, lying face downward, arms outflung.

“After a moment I stooped and touched him, and the entire prostrate figure dissolved into dust where it lay, leaving at my feet a shadow shape in thin silhouette against the pavement—merely a gray layer of finest dust shaped like a man, a tracery of impalpable powder on the stones.

“Upward and around me I passed the burning candle; vast figures in blue and red and gold grew out of the darkness; the painted walls sparkled; the shadows that had slept through all those centuries trembled and shrank away into distant corners.

"And then—and then I saw the gold edges of her sandals sparkle in the darkness, and the clasped girdle of virgin gold around her slender waist glimmered like purest flame!"

Burke, leaning far across the table, interlocked hands tightening, stared into space. A smile edged his mouth; his voice grew wonderfully gentle:

"Why, she was scarcely eighteen—this child—lying there so motionless, so lifelike, with the sandals edging her little upturned feet, and the small hands of her folded between the breasts. It was as though she had just stretched herself out there—scarcely sound asleep as yet, and her thick, silky hair—cut as they cut children's hair in these days, you know—cradled her head and cheeks.

"So marvelous the mimicry of life, so absolute the deception of breathing sleep, that I scarce dared move, fearing to awaken her.

"When I did move I forgot the dusty shape of the dead at my feet, and left, full across his neck, the imprint of a spurred riding boot. It gave me my first shudder; I turned, feeling beneath my foot the soft, yielding powder, and stood aghast. Then—it is absurd!—but I felt as a man feels who has trodden inadvertently upon another's foot—and in an impulse of reparation I stooped hastily and attempted to smooth out the mortal dust which bore the imprint of my heel. But the fine powder flaked my glove, and, looking about for something to compose the ashes with, I picked up a papyrus scroll. Perhaps he himself had written on it; nobody can ever know, and I used it as a sort of hoe to scrape him together and smooth him out on the stones."

The young man drew a yellowish roll of paper-like substance from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"This is the same papyrus," he said. "I had forgotten that I carried it away with me until I found it in my shooting coat while packing to sail for New York."

The Tracer of Lost Persons reached over and picked up the scroll. It was flexible still, but brittle; he opened it with great care, considered the strange figures upon it for a while, then turned almost sharply on his visitor.

"Go on," he said.

And Burke went on:

"The candle was burning low; I lighted two more, placing them at her head and feet on the edges of the stone couch. Then, lighting a third candle, I stood beside the couch and looked down at the dead girl under her veil-like robe, set with golden stars."

He passed his hand wearily over his hair and forehead.

"I do not know what the accepted meaning of beauty may be if it was not there under my eyes. Flawless as palest amber ivory and rose, the smooth-flowing contours melted into exquisite symmetry; lashes like darkest velvet rested on the pure curve of the cheeks; the closed lids, the mouth still faintly stained with color, the delicate nose, the full, childish lips, sensitive, sweet, resting softly upon each other—if these were not all parts of but one lovely miracle, then there is no beauty save in a dream of Paradise. . . .

"A gold band of linked scarabs bound her short, thick hair straight across the forehead; thin scales of gold fell from a necklace, clothing her breasts in brilliant discolored metal, through which ivory-tinted skin showed. A belt of pure, soft gold clasped her body at the waist; gold-edged sandals clung to her little feet.

"At first, when the stunned surprise had subsided, I thought that I was looking upon some miracle of ancient embalming, hitherto unknown. Yet, in the smooth skin there was no slit to prove it, no opening in any vein or artery, no mutilation of this sculptured masterpiece of the Most High, no cerements, no bandages, no gilded carven case with painted face to stare open eyed through the waiting cycles.

"This was the image of sleep—of life unconscious—not of death. Yet it was death—death that had come upon her centuries and centuries ago; for the gold had turned iridescent and magnificently discolored; the sandal straps fell into dust as I bent above them, leaving the sandals clinging to her feet only by the wired silver core of the thongs. And, as I touched it fearfully, the veil-like garment covering her, vanished into thin air, its metal stars twinkling in a shower around her on the stone floor."

The Tracer, motionless, intent, scarcely breathed; the younger man moved restlessly in his chair, the dazed light in his eyes clearing to sullen consciousness.

"What more is there to tell?" he said. "And to what purpose? All this is time wasted. I have my work cut out for me. What more is there to tell?"

"What you have left untold," said the Tracer, with the slightest ring of authority in his quiet voice.

And, as though he had added "Obey!" the younger man sank back in his chair, his hands contracting nervously.

"I went back to El Teb," he said; "I walked like a dreaming man. My sleep was haunted by her beauty; night after night, when at last I fell asleep, instantly I saw her face, and her dark eyes opening into mine in childish bewilderment; day after day I rode out to the fallen pillar and descended to that dark chamber where she lay alone. Then there came a time when I could not endure the thought of her lying there alone. I had never dared to touch her. Horror of what might happen had held me aloof lest she crumble at my touch to that awful powder which I had trodden on.

"I did not know what to do; my Arabs had begun to whisper among themselves, suspicious of my absences, impatient to break camp, perhaps, and roam on once more. Perhaps they believed I had discovered treasure somewhere; I am not sure. At any rate, dread of their following me, determination to take my dead away with me, drove me into action; and that day when I reached her silent chamber I lighted my candle, and, leaning above her for one last look, I touched her shoulder with my finger tip.

"It was a strange sensation. Prepared for a dreadful dissolution, utterly unprepared for cool, yielding flesh, I almost dropped where I stood. For her body was neither cold nor warm, neither dust-dry nor moist; neither the skin of the living nor the dead. It was firm, almost stiff, yet not absolutely without a certain hint of flexibility.

"The appalling wonder of it consumed me; fear, incredulity, terror, apathy succeeded each other; then slowly a fierce shrinking happiness swept me in every fiber.

"This marvelous death, this triumph of beauty over death, was mine. Never again should she lie here alone through the solitudes of night and day; never again should the dignity of Death lack the tribute demanded of Life. Here was the appointed watcher—I, who had found her alone in the wastes of the world—all alone on the outermost edges of the world—a child, dead and unguarded. And standing there beside her I knew that I should never love again."

He straightened up, stretching out his arm: "I did not intend to carry her away to what is known as Christian burial. How could I consign her to darkness again, with all its dreadful mockery of marble, all its awful emblems?

"This lovely stranger was to be my guest forever. The living should be near her while she slept so sweetly her slumber through the centuries; she should have warmth, and soft hangings and sunlight and flowers; and her unconscious ears should be filled with the pleasant stir of living things. . . . I have a house in the country, a very old house among meadows and young woodlands. And I—I had dreamed of giving this child a home—"

His voice broke; he buried his head in his hands a moment; but when he lifted it again his features were hard as steel.

"There was already talk in the bazaar about me. I was probably followed, but I did not know it. Then one of my men disappeared. For a week I hesitated to trust my Arabs; but there was no other way. I told them there was a mummy which I desired to carry to some port and smuggle out of the country without consulting the Government. I knew perfectly well that the Government would never forego its claim to such a relic of Egyptian antiquity. I offered my men too much, perhaps. I don't know. They hesitated for a week, trying by every artifice to see the treasure, but I never let them out of my sight.

"Then one day two white men came into camp; and with them came a government escort to arrest me for looting an Egyptian tomb. The white men were Joram Smiles and that Eurasian, Emanuel Gandon, who was partly white, I suppose. I didn't comprehend what they were up to at first. They escorted me forty miles to confront the official at Shen-Bak. When, after a stormy week, I was permitted to return to Saïs, my Arabs and the white men were gone. And the stone chamber under the water garden wall was empty as the hand I hold out to you!"

He opened his palm and rose, his narrowing eyes clear and dangerous.

"At the bazaar I learned enough to know what had been done. I traced the white men to the coast. They sailed on the *Scythian Queen*, taking with them all that I care for on earth or in heaven! And you ask me why I measure their distance from me by a bullet's flight!"

The Tracer also rose, pale and grave.

"Wait!" he said. "There are other things to be done before you prepare to face a jury for double murder."

"It is for them to choose," said Burke. "They shall have the choice of returning to me my dead, or of going to hell full of lead."

"*Ex*actly, my dear sir. That part is not difficult," said the Tracer quietly. "There will be no occasion for violence, I assure you. Kindly leave such details to me. I know what is to be done. You are outwardly very calm, Mr. Burke—even dangerously placid; but though you maintain an admirable command over yourself superficially, you are laboring under terrible excitement. Therefore it is my duty to say to you at once that there is no cause for your excitement, no cause for your apprehension as to results. I feel exceedingly confident that you will, in due time, regain possession of all that you care for most—quietly, quietly, my dear sir! You are not yet ready to meet these men, nor am I ready to go with you. I beg you to continue your habit of self-command for a little while. There is no haste—that is to say, there is every reason to make haste slowly. And the quickest method is to seat yourself. Thank you. And I shall sit here beside you and spread out this papyrus scroll for your inspection."

Burke stared at the Tracer, then at the scroll.

"What has that inscription to do with the matter in hand?" he demanded impatiently.

"I leave you to judge," said the Tracer. A dull tint of excitement flushed his lean cheeks; he twisted his gray mustache and bent over the unrolled scroll which was now held flat by weights at the four corners.

"Can you understand any of these symbols, Mr. Burke?" he asked.

"No."

"Curious," mused the Tracer. "Do you know it was fortunate that you put this bit of papyrus in the pocket of your shooting coat—so fortunate that, in a way, it approaches the miraculous?"

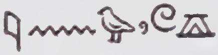
"What do you mean? Is there anything in that scroll bearing on this matter?"

"Yes."

"And you can read it? Are you versed in such learning, Mr. Keen?"

"I am an Egyptologist—among other details," said the Tracer calmly.

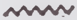
The young man gazed at him, astonished. The Tracer of Lost Persons picked up a pencil, laid a sheet of paper on the table beside the papyrus, and slowly began to copy the first symbol:



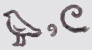
XIX

"The ancient Egyptian word for the personal pronoun 'I' was *anuk*," said the Tracer placidly. "The phonetic for *a* was the hieroglyph

a reed; for *n* the water symbol

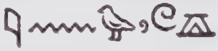


for *u* the symbols



for *k*

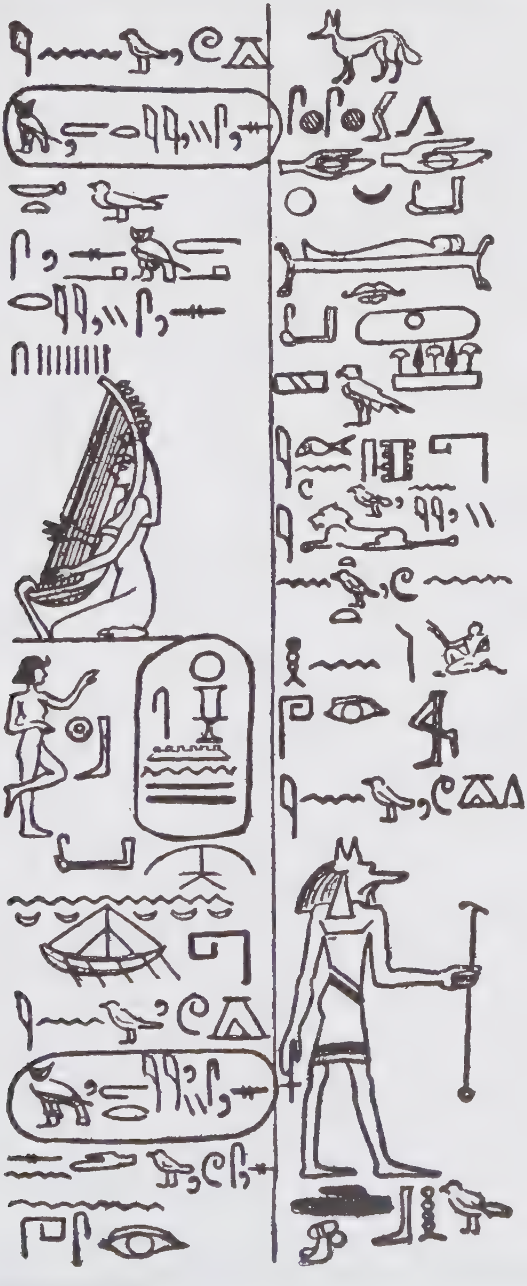
Therefore this hieroglyphic inscription begins with the personal pronoun



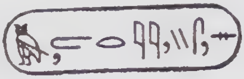
or *I*. That is very easy, of course.

"Now, the most ancient of Egyptian inscriptions read vertically in columns; there are only two columns in this papyrus, so we'll try it vertically and pass downward to the next symbol, which is inclosed in a sort of frame or cartouch. That immediately signifies that royalty is mentioned; therefore, we have already translated as much as 'I, the king (or queen).' Do you see?"

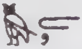
"Yes," said Burke, staring.



"Very well. Now this symbol, number two,



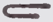
spells out the word '*Meris*,' in this way: M (pronounced *me*) is phonetically symbolized by the characters



r by

(a mouth) and the comma

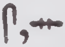
and the hieroglyph



i by two reeds

and two oblique strokes,

and *s* by



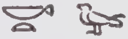
This gives us Meris, the name of that deposed and fugitive king of Egypt who, after a last raid on the summer palace of Mer-Shen, usurping ruler of Egypt, was followed and tracked to Saïs, where, with an arrow through his back, he crawled to El Teb and finally died there of his wound. All this Egyptologists are perfectly familiar with in the translations of the boastful tablets and inscriptions erected near Saïs by Mer-Shen, the three hundred and twelfth sovereign after Queen Nitocris."

He looked up at Burke, smiling. "Therefore," he said, "this papyrus scroll was written by Meris, ex-king, a speculative thousands of years before Christ. And it begins: 'I, Meris the King.'"

"How does all this bear upon what concerns me?" demanded Burke.

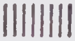
"Wait!"

Something in the quiet significance of the Tracer's brief command sent a curious thrill through the younger man. He leaned stiffly forward, studying the scroll, every faculty concentrated on the symbol which the Tracer had now touched with the carefully sharpened point of his pencil:

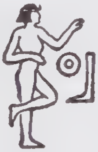


"That," said Mr. Keen, "is the ancient Egyptian word for 'little,' '*Ket*.' The next, below, written in two lines, is 'Samaris,' a proper name—the name of a woman. Under that, again, is the symbol for the number 18; the decimal sign,

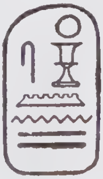
and eight vertical strokes,



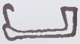
Under that, again, is a hieroglyph of another sort, an ideograph representing a girl with a harp; and, beneath that, the symbol which always represented a dancing girl



and also the royal symbol inclosed in a cartouche,



which means literally 'the Ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt.' Under that is the significant symbol



representing an arm and a hand holding a stick. This always means *force*—to take forcibly or to use violence. Therefore, so far, we have the following literal translation: 'I, Meris the King, little Samaris, eighteen, a harpist, dancing girl, the Ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt, to take by violence—'"

"What does that make?" broke in Burke impatiently.

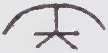
"*Wait!* Wait until we have translated everything literally. And, Mr. Burke, it might make it easier for us both if you would remember that I have had the pleasure of deciphering many hundreds of papyri before you had ever heard that there were such things."

"I beg your pardon," said the young man in a low voice.

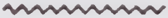
"I beg yours for my impatience," said the Tracer pleasantly. "This deciphering always did affect my nerves and shorten my temper. And, no doubt, it is quite as hard on you. Shall we go on, Mr. Burke?"

"If you please, Mr. Keen."

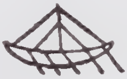
So the Tracer laid his pencil point on the next symbol



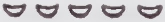
"That is the symbol for night," he said; "and that



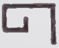
is the water symbol again, as you know; and that



is the ideograph, meaning a ship. The five reversed crescents

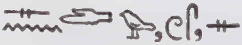


record the number of days voyage; the sign

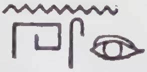


means a house, and is also the letter H in the Egyptian alphabet.

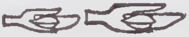
"Under it, again, we have a repetition of the first symbol meaning *I*, and a repetition of the second symbol, meaning 'Meris, the King.' Then, below that cartouch, comes a new symbol,



which is the feminine personal pronoun, *sentus*, meaning '*she*'; and the first column is completed with the symbol for the ancient Egyptian verb, *nehes*, 'to awake,'



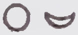
"And now we take the second column, which begins with the jackal ideograph expressing slyness or cleverness. Under it is the hieroglyph meaning 'to run away,' 'to escape.' And under that, Mr. Burke, is one of the rarest of all Egyptian symbols; a symbol seldom seen on stone or papyrus,



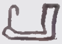
except in rare references to the mysteries of Isis. The meaning of it, so long in dispute, has finally been practically determined through a new discovery in the cuneiform inscriptions. It is the symbol of two hands holding two *closed* eyes; and it signifies power."

"You mean that those ancients understood hypnotism?" asked Burke, astonished.

"Evidently their priests did; evidently hypnotism was understood and employed in certain mysteries. And there is the symbol of it; and under it the hieroglyphs



meaning 'a day and a night,' with the symbol

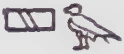


as usual present to signify force or strength employed. Under that, again, is a human figure stretched upon a typical Egyptian couch. And now, Mr. Burke, *note carefully* three modifying signs: first, that it is a *couch* or *bed* on which the figure is stretched, not the funeral couch, not the embalming slab; second, there is no mummy mask covering the face, and no mummy case covering the body; third, that under the recumbent figure is pictured an *open* mouth, not a *closed* one.

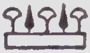
"All these modify the ideograph, apparently representing death. But the sleep symbol is not present. Therefore it is a sound inference that all this simply confirms the symbol of hypnotism."

Burke, intensely absorbed, stared steadily at the scroll.

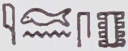
"Now," continued Mr. Keen, "we note the symbol of force again, always present; and, continuing horizontally, a cartouche quite empty except for the midday sun. That is simply translated; the midday sun illuminates nothing. Meris, deposed, is king only in name; and the sun no longer shines on him as 'Ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt.' Under that despairing symbol, 'King of Nothing,' we have

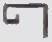


the phonetics which spell *sha*, the word for garden. And, just beyond this, horizontally, the modifying ideograph meaning 'a *water* garden';

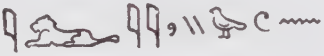


a design of lotus and tree alternating on a terrace. Under that is the symbol for the word '*aneb*,'

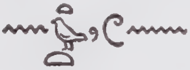




a 'wall.' Beyond that, horizontally, is the symbol for 'house.' It should be placed under the wall symbol, but the Egyptians were very apt to fill up spaces instead of continuing their vertical columns. Now, beneath, we find the imperative command

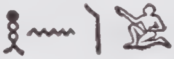


'arise!' And the Egyptian personal pronoun '*entuten*,'

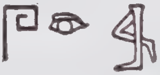


which means 'you' or 'thou.'

"Under that is the symbol



which means 'priest,' or, literally, 'priest man.' Then comes the imperative 'awake to life!'

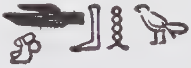


After that, our first symbol again, meaning '*I*,' followed horizontally by the symbol

signifying 'to go.'

"Then comes a very important drawing—you see?—the picture of a man with a jackal's head, not a dog's head. It is not accompanied by the phonetic in a cartouch, as it should be. Probably the writer was in desperate haste at the end. But, nevertheless, it is easy to translate that symbol of the man with a jackal's head. It is a picture of the Egyptian god, Anubis, who was supposed to linger at the side of the dying to conduct their souls. Anubis, the jackal-headed, is the courier, the personal escort of departing souls. And this is he.

"And now the screed ends with the cry 'Pray for me!'



the last symbol on this strange scroll—this missive written by a deposed, wounded, and dying king to an unnamed priest. Here is the literal translation in columns:

I
Meris the King
little
Samaris
eighteen
a harpist
a dancing girl—Ruler of
  Upper and Lower
  Egypt
took forcibly—night
by water
five days
ship
house
I
Meris the King
she
awake
cunning
escape
hypnotize
King of Nothing
place forcibly
garden
water garden
wall
house
Arise. Do
Thou
Priest Man
Awake
To life
I go
Anubis
Pray

"And this is what that letter, thousands of years old, means in this language of ours, hundreds of years young: 'I, Meris the King, seized little Samaris, a harpist and a dancing girl, eighteen years of age, belonging to the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, and carried her away at night on shipboard—a voyage of five days—to my house. I, Meris the King, lest she lie awake watching cunningly for a chance to escape, hypnotized her (or had her hypnotized) so that she lay like one dead or asleep, but breathing, and I, King no longer of Upper and Lower Egypt, took her and placed her in my house under the wall of the water garden. Arise! therefore, O thou priest; (go) and awaken her to life. I am dying (I go with Anubis!). Pray for me!'"

XX

For a full minute the two men sat there without moving or speaking. Then the Tracer laid aside his pencil.

"To sum up," he said, opening the palm of his left hand and placing the forefinger of his right across it, "the excavation made by the falling pillar raised in triumph above the water garden of the deposed king, Meris, by his rival, was the subterranean house of Meris. The prostrate figure which crumbled to powder at your touch may have been the very priest to whom this letter or papyrus was written. Perhaps the bearer of the scroll was a traitor and stabbed the priest as he was reading the missive. Who can tell how that priest died? He either died or betrayed his trust, for he never aroused the little Samaris from her suspended animation. And the water garden fell into ruins and she slept; and the Ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt raised his columns, lotus crowned, above the ruins; and she slept on. Then—*you* came."

Burke stared like one stupefied.

"I do not know," said the Tracer gravely, "what balm there may be in a suspension of sensation, perhaps of vitality, to protect the human body from corruption after death. I do not know how soon suspended animation or the state of hypnotic coma, undisturbed, changes into death—whether it comes gradually, imperceptibly freeing the soul; whether the soul hides there, asleep, until suddenly the flame of vitality is extinguished. I do not know how long she lay there with life in her."

He leaned back and touched an electric bell, then, turning to Burke:

"Speaking of pistol range," he said, "unstrap those weapons and pass them over, if you please."

And the young man obeyed as in a trance.

"Thank you. There are four men coming into this room. You will keep your seat, if you please, Mr. Burke."

After a moment the door opened noiselessly. Two men handcuffed together entered the room; two men, hands in their pockets, sauntered carelessly behind the prisoners and leaned back against the closed door.

"That short, red-haired, lame man with the cast in his eye—do you recognize him?" asked the Tracer quietly.

Burke, grasping the arms of his chair, had started to rise, fury fairly blazing from his eyes; but, at the sound of the Tracer's calm, even voice, he sank back into his chair.

"That is Joram Smiles? You recognize him?" continued Mr. Keen.

Burke nodded.

"*Ex*actly—alias Limpy, alias Red Jo, alias Big Stick Joram, alias Pinky; swindler, international confidence man, fence, burglar, gambler; convicted in 1887, and sent to Sing Sing for forgery; convicted in 1898, and sent to Auburn for swindling; arrested by my men on board the S.S. *Scythian Queen*, at the cabled request of John T. Burke, Esquire, and held to explain the nature of his luggage, which consisted of the contents of an Egyptian vault or underground ruin, declared at the customhouse as a mummy, and passed as such."

The quiet, monotonous voice of the Tracer halted, then, as he glanced at the second prisoner, grew harder:

"Emanuel Gandon, general international criminal, with over half a hundred aliases, arrested in company with Smiles and held until Mr. Burke's arrival."

Turning to Burke, the Tracer continued: "Fortunately, the *Scythian Queen* broke down off Brindisi. It gave us time to act on your cable; we found these men aboard when she was signaled off the Hook. I went out with the pilot myself, Mr. Burke."

Smiles shot a wicked look at Burke; Gandon scowled at the floor.

"Now," said the Tracer pleasantly, meeting the venomous glare of Smiles, "I'll get you that warrant you have been demanding to have exhibited to you. Here it is—charging you and your amiable friend Gandon with breaking into and robbing the Metropolitan Museum of ancient Egyptian gold ornaments, in March, 1903, and taking them to France, where they were sold to collectors. It seems that you found the business good enough to go prowling about Egypt on a hunt for something to sell here. A great mistake, my friends—a very great mistake, because, after the Museum has finished with you, the Egyptian Government desires to extradite you. And I rather suspect you'll have to go."

He nodded to the two quiet men leaning against the door.

"Come, Joram," said one of them pleasantly.

But Smiles turned furiously on the Tracer. "You lie, you old gray rat!" he cried. "That ain't no mummy; that's a plain dead girl! And there ain't no extrydition for body snatchin', so I guess them niggers at Cairo won't get us, after all!"

"Perhaps," said the Tracer, looking at Burke, who had risen, pale and astounded. "Sit down, Mr. Burke! There is no need to question these men; no need to demand what they robbed you of. For," he added slowly, "what they took from the garden grotto of Saïs, and from you, I have under my own protection."

The Tracer rose, locked the door through which the prisoners and their escorts had departed; then, turning gravely on Burke, he continued:

"That panel, there, is a door. There is a room beyond—a room facing to the south, bright with sunshine, flowers, soft rugs, and draperies of the East. *She* is there—like a child asleep!"

Burke reeled, steadying himself against the wall; the Tracer stared at space, speaking very slowly:

"Such death I have never before heard of. From the moment she came under my protection I have dared to doubt—many things. And an hour ago you brought me a papyrus scroll confirming my doubts. I doubt still—Heaven knows what! Who can say how long the flame of life may flicker within suspended animation? A week? A month? A year? Longer than that? Yes; the Hindoos have proved it. How long? The span of a normal life? Or longer? Can the life flame burn indefinitely when the functions are absolutely suspended—generation after generation, century after century—?"

Burke, ghastly white, straightened up, quivering in every limb; the Tracer, as pale as he, laid his hand on the secret panel.

"If—if you dare say it—the phrase is this: '*O Ket Samaris, Nehes!*'—'O Little Samaris, awake!'"

"I—dare. In Heaven's name, open that door!"

Then, averting his head, the Tracer of Lost Persons swung open the panel.

A flood of sunshine flashed on Burke's face; he entered; and the paneled door closed behind him without a sound.

Minute after minute passed; the Tracer stood as though turned to stone, gray head bent.

Then he heard Burke's voice ring out unsteadily:

"O Ket Samaris—Samaris! O Ket Samaris—*Nehes!*"

And again: "Samaris! Samaris! O beloved, awake!"

And once more: "*Nehes!* O Samaris!"

Silence, broken by a strange, sweet, drowsy plaint—like a child awakened at midnight by a dazzling light.

"Samaris!"

Then, through the stillness, a little laugh, and a softly tremulous voice:

"Ari un āhā, O Entuk sen!" ❋

The Tree of Heaven

TO MY FRIEND

AUSTIN CORBIN

The Tree of Heaven
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Book Publication 1907

The Carpet of Belshazzar

We all were glad to see him; on his return he had found us all his friends. Nobody had spoken to him about his abrupt departure from New York; nobody had mentioned Westover; nothing connected with that episode was even hinted at by any of us, I believe, during his short sojourn among us. It was he himself who spoke of it first.

Of course during his absence we had followed his career; many among us had read and tried to understand what he had written in his three world-famous volumes, "Occult Philosophy," "The Weight of Human Souls," and "The Interstellar Laws of Psychic Phenomena."

It seemed, at times, here to us in America, that it was impossible that the man we had known so well could have become the great Psychic Scientist who had written these three astounding works—who now occupied the Chair of Psychical Philosophy in the great University of Trebizond—the man who was the confidential adviser of the Shah of Persia, the mentor of the Ameer of Afghanistan, the inspirer of the greatest diplomat of all the East—the late Akhound of Swat.

As he sat there in his immaculate evening dress, bronzed, youthful looking, presiding so quietly at the little dinner which he had given to us as a half-formal, half-intimate leave-taking before he sailed, it seemed to us incredible that this man, now on his return journey to Trebizond *via* Lhassa, could be the beloved and dreaded arbiter of Asiatic politics—the one white man in all the Orient who had ever been wholly respected, and absolutely feared by the temporal and spiritual heads of nations, religions, clans, and sects.

That, of course, he was what is popularly known as an adept, we supposed. What his wisdom, his insight, his amazing knowledge of the occult might include, we preferred, rather uncomfortably, not to conjecture.

There is, naturally, in all of us a childlike desire to hear of marvels; there is also a stronger and more childish desire to see miracles performed.

I am quite sure that we all hoped he might perhaps care to do something for us—merely to convince us. And at first, I know that many among us, seated there in the private room at the Lenox Club, felt a trifle ill at ease and a little in awe of this man with whom we were at such close quarters.

There was nothing particularly remarkable about the dinner; it was the usual excellent affair one might expect at the Lenox; the wines perfect, the service flawless.

And now, smoking our cigars, lounging in groups over the flower-laden table, we fell into the old, intimate, easy channels of conversation, chatting of past days, of our hopes and ambitions.

And our host, quiet, self-contained, pushed back his chair, looking somewhat curiously, I thought, from one to the other. And I thought, too, as his pleasant bronzed features changed from a faint smile to a graver expression, and then reverted to the smile for a moment, that he seemed to see something in each of us that was perhaps hidden from ourselves—that, as his eyes swept us, he was not only capable of reading much of what was not understood by us, but also something in the hidden future which awaited each of us.

So strongly did this idea begin to take hold of me that it began to make me uneasy. I felt, too, that others among us harbored that same idea—for the conversation was less accented now, and intermittent; voices had fallen to a lower, quieter pitch; and after a little nobody spoke.

Then I saw that we all were looking straight at our host, as though under some subtle and fascinated compulsion.

He sat very still; his composure appeared a trifle forced, as though he had voicelessly summoned us to concentrate upon him our attention, and was now searching for the exact words for some statement which he had meant to make to us all.

After a moment a slight flush crept over his handsome face. He said:

"You fellows are very good to come here and let me take leave of you so pleasantly. You have been very kind to me since I have come again among you. The sort of friendship that asks nothing but takes a man for granted is a good sort. Helmer,"—he looked at the sculptor Helmer—"I shall see you soon again." We all turned in surprise to Helmer, who seemed as surprised as we were. "I shall see you sooner than you expect . . . Smith!"—he smiled at J. Abingdon Smith, 3d—"some day you will uproot a Tree of Dreams, but not the dream, Smith; that will become very real when you awake—as true"—and he turned to the man on his left—"as true as a dream which you shall dream under the Sign of Venus."

We sat there breathless, expectant. He was doing something after all; he was prophesying, in a curious sort of manner, probably speaking in symbols. And though we could not understand, we listened while the little shivers fluttered our pulses.

Then he looked at Edgerton, smiling; and Edgerton flushed up and looked back at him, almost defiantly.

"Edgerton," he said, "don't worry too much. What is not to be settled in court can sometimes be settled—*ex curia*." And to the young man on his right: "Doctor, don't overwork. If you do you will learn a stranger truth than is locked up among the molecules and atoms in your laboratory!"

Then he leaned across the table and laid one hand on Leeds's shoulder. "I congratulate you," he said, smiling; "you've got a good-natured ghost following you about. But he'll leave you if you turn idle. And don't be afraid, my boy."

"I'm not afraid," said young Leeds, rather pallid, but straightening up in his chair.

Our host laughed; then his face changed, and he raised his eyes to Shannon:

"Where is Harrod?" he asked slowly.

"At Bar Harbor," replied Shannon, "I believe."

"I thought so. And—remember one thing—there is a certain law which governs the validity of a check drawn to a man's order when that check has been signed by a man no longer living. But, Shannon, the intention is the important thing in such a matter."

"What, exactly, do you mean?" asked Shannon, astonished.

But our host had already turned to Escourt:

"Captain," he said, "you sail—when?"

"I have no sailing orders," laughed Escourt.

"Not yet?" Our host looked quietly at the young officer. "Well, it isn't the length of a voyage that counts, Escourt—nor the size of the troopship. No; you will anchor, some day, in a smaller craft than you started in, in the Port of the Golden Pool."

Escourt, still smiling, waited; but our host sat silent, head bent, one hand on the edge of the tablecloth.

"Not one of you," he said, without raising his eyes, "not one among you but who shall come face to face with what you still consider miracles. . . . Even Hildreth, yonder"—Hildreth jumped—"even Hildreth shall learn from the Swastika."

"Swa—swat? What—what?" stammered Hildreth.

"Nothing to alarm you," smiled the other; then again the swift shadow fell across his face.

"Not one man among you who has not proven his friendship for me," he said, looking up and around. And to me he added: "You must prove it still further by telling fearlessly to the world what there will be to tell after I have gone, and after my words have been proven—the words I have spoken here to-night—and which no one among you understands. . . . But you all will understand them. And when the last man among you has understood"—turning again to me—"you must bear witness to the world, bear witness in printed page and over your own signature. Do you promise?"

"Yes," I said.

Then very quietly he looked around the table, and leaned forward, regarding each man in turn.

"I think," he said, "that it is time you understood exactly the facts about which you have forborne to question me. And I mean to tell you before we part; I mean to tell you the truth concerning Westover and—all that happened. . . . And when you know these facts, then you may begin to surmise why I went to Trebizond, why I remain, and—and—*what miracle of happiness I have found there—for the third time reincarnated.*"

He leaned back in his chair; his clear eyes became fixed and dreamy. Then he began to speak, in a low voice, as though to himself:

* * *

Time, and the funeral of Time, alas!—and the Old Year's passing-bell! Whistles from city and river, deep horns sounding from the foggy docks; and under my window a voice and a song—ah! that young voice in the street below calling me through the falling snow!

* * *

If it be true that Time makes all hurts well, I do not know; and "a thousand years in Thy sight is but as yesterday when it is passed, and as a watch in the night"; a thousand years! And this also is true; the flames of love make hot the furnace of Abaddon.

* * *

We were in the gallery as usual, Geraldine and I—the gallery where the carpets of the East were hung along the shadowy walls. For lately it was my pleasure to acquire rare rugs, and it was my profession to furnish expert opinion upon the age and origin of Oriental carpets, and to read and interpret the histories of forgotten emperors and the mysteries of long-forgotten gods from the colors and intricate flowery labyrinths tied in silk or wool to the warps of some dead sultan's lustrous tapestry.

Here in the long sky gallery hung my own rugs against the arabesque incrusted-ivory panels—Tabriz, Shiraz, Sehna, and Saruk—a somber blaze of color shot with fire—all rare, some priceless; Turkish Kulah, softly silky as a golden lion's hide, Persian Sehna, shimmering with rose and violet lights, fiercely brilliant rugs from Samarkand, superbly flowered, secreting deep in every floral thicket traceries of the ancient Mongol conqueror; Feraghans glowing like jewel-sewn velvets set with the Herati and the lotus—symbols of Egypt or of China, as you please to interpret the oldest pattern in the world.

Far in the gallery's amber-tinted gloom the red of Ispahan dominated, subduing fiery vistas to smoldering harmony through which, like a vast sapphire set in opals, glimmered the superb lost Persian blue.

There was one other rug, an Eighur, the famous so-called "Babilu," or "Carpet of Belshazzar"; but it hung alone in imperial magnificence behind the locked doors of a marble room, which it seemed to fill with a soft luster of its own, radiating from the mystic "Tree of Heaven" woven in its center.

We were, as I say, in this gallery; Geraldine poring over an illuminated volume on cuneiform inscriptions, I, with pad and pencil, idly shifting and reshifting the Kufic key to the ancient cipher, which always left me stranded where I had begun with the stately repetition:

"King of Kings—
King of Kings—
King of Kings—"

As for Westover, my cousin, he was, as usual, in the laboratory fussing with his venomous extracts—an occupation which, to my dismay, he had taken up within the year, working, as he explained, on the theory that every poison has its antidote. Yet it seemed to me that he was more anxious to invent some new and subtle toxic than to devise the remedy.

From where I sat I could not see him, but the crystalline tinkle of his glass retorts and bottles distracted my attention from the penciled calculations. Without moving my head, I glanced across the room at Geraldine. She looked up immediately, raising her level eyebrows in mute inquiry as though I had moved or spoken; then, realizing that I had not, she bent above the book once more, the warm color stealing to her cheeks.

Within the year a wordless intimacy had grown up between us; we never understood it, never acknowledged it, and at times it disconcerted us.

I sat silent, tracing with my pencil series after series of futile Kufic combinations with the cuneiforms, but ever the first turn of the ancient key creaked in my ears,

"King of Kings—
King of Kings—"

until the triverbal reiteration wore on my nerves.

Geraldine leaned back abruptly, closing her book.

"I'm tired and nervous," she said. "You may wear out your eyes and temper if you choose—and you're doing the latter, for I'm as restless as an eel. Besides, I'm lonely, and I'm going back to the East—if you'll come, too."

I laughed, understanding what she meant by the "East."

"Will you come with me?" she insisted.

"Yes," I said, "whenever you are ready."

She sprang to her feet, scattering the illuminated pages over the floor, and stood an instant facing me, tall, dark-eyed, smiling, brushing back the lustrous hair from her cheeks.

"Where is Jim?" she asked—although we both knew.

"In the laboratory," I replied mechanically.

Still busy with her hair, she regarded me dreamily out of those dark, sweet eyes of hers.

"It would be wonderful," she mused, "if Jim should find an antidote to death; but I wish it were not necessary to kill so many little helpless creatures. Did you hear that pitiful sound in there yesterday? Was it something he was killing?"

"I don't know," I said. And after a silence: "What are you going to do?"

She shook her head vaguely and leaned against the window, looking out into the rain.

"Shall we go back to our inscriptions?" I suggested.

She shook her head again. After a while she turned away from the window, stifling a dainty yawn, and stretched out, languidly straightening up to the full height of her young body.

"I feel stupid," she said; "I'm tired of cryptograms and the pages of dusty books. I'm tired of the rain, too. The languor of April is in me. I'm homesick for lands I never knew. So come back to the East with me, Dick."

She held out her hand to me with a confident little smile; and knowing what she meant, I acquiesced in her caprice, and conducted her solemnly to the piano, leaving her before it.

She stood there for a space, musing, her lovely head bent; then, still standing, she struck a sequence of chords—chords pulsating with color; and through them flashed strange little trills like threads of tinsel.

"This is an Eighur carpet I am dreaming of," she murmured, as the music swelled, glowing as tints and hues glow in the old dyes of the East.

Wave on wave of color seemed to spread from the keys under her fingers; she looked back at me over her shoulder with a warning nod.

"I shall begin to weave very soon. Khiounnou horsemen may appear and frighten me for a moment—but I shall finish. Listen! I am at the loom."

Seating herself, she developed out of the flowing, somber harmony a monotonous minor theme, suddenly checked by a distant rattle like the clatter of nomad lances on painted stirrups; then she picked up the thread of the melody again, dropped it, breathless for a moment's quivering silence, resumed it, twisting it into delicate arabesques, threading it across the dull, rich harmonies, at first slowly, then faster, faster, swift as the flying fingers of a nomad maid tying fretted silver in a Ghiordes knot. The whirring tempo was the cadence of the loom; soft feathery notes flew like carded wool; thicker, duller, softer grew the fabric, dense, silky, heavily lustrous.

Suddenly she broke the thread off short, the whole fabric falling with a muffled shock.

"Why did you do that?" I demanded wrathfully.

"The rug is woven; the weaver is dead," she said.

"Oh, go on, Geraldine," I insisted; "don't stop half way in a thing like that. It's the East—it's the real East, I tell you. How you do it—you who have never seen the East—Heaven only knows!"

"U Allah Aalem," she murmured; "it's in me." Then she looked back at me, laughing. "Centuries ago you and I heard that music along the Arax—or I sang it among the Tcherkess roses for you, perhaps—perhaps in the gardens of Trebizond."

"That might explain it," I said gravely. Lately she had found pleasure in a fancy that she and I had lived together in the East, centuries since, and that we were soon to return forever.

"You and I," she mused, touching the keys lightly—"and Jim, of course," she added.

"Of course," I said.

She dropped her head, striking chord on chord with nervous precision; and hanging in the wake of every ringing harmony a frail melody floated like the Chinese cloud band in a Kirman tapestry.

"What's that air?" I asked, fascinated.

"I don't know; it sounds pagan, doesn't it?—like the wicked beauty of Babylon. Do you hear how it beats on and on like the rhythm of naked feet—little, delicate, naked feet ablaze with gems—the feet of Herodiade perhaps—thud—thud—tching!—don't you hear them, Dick? And now listen to those silky, flowery trills! They're Asiatic; ancient Cathay is awaking—camel bells in the hazar of the Golden Emperor! Hark!—now you hear trumpets, don't you? Well, of course that must be the Mongols marching with the Prince of the Vanguard. Hark! How savagely the brutal Afghan theme breaks in with its fierce trampling and the staccato echo of Tekke drums! It's frightening me out of the East. I think we had better come home, Dick," she added, mischievously running into the latest popular street song.

"How on earth could you do that!" I exclaimed wrathfully. "You're a futile mixture of feather brain and genius!"

But where was the genius hidden under that laughing and exquisite mask confronting me? Suddenly the delicate mask became grave.

"Let me laugh when I can, Dick," she said. "It is not often I laugh."

I was silent.

"Of course you may be horrid if you choose," she observed with a shrug, running a brilliantly inane series of trills from end to end of the keyboard. "But it's no use scolding, for I won't study, I won't compose, I won't 'try to do something,' and I won't be serious. I'm shallow, I'm frivolous, I've the soul of a Trebizond dancing girl, and I like it. Now what are you going to do?"

"I'm going out," I said ungraciously.

"Oh—alone?"

"Not if you'll come. It's stopped raining. Will you come? Oh, get your hat, Geraldine, and stop that torment of idiotic trills!"

"If Jim doesn't mind, I think I'll go and sit in the laboratory with him," she observed carelessly.

I looked at her without comment.

"I have a curious idea," she continued, "that he might like to have me around to-day while he is working."

I stared at her, but there was no bitterness in her tranquil smile as she leaned forward, resting her elbows on the polished rosewood case.

"So I won't go with you, Dick," she said slowly.

One of those intervals of restless silence, which within the year we had learned to dread, menaced us now. Mute, motionless, I watched the soft color deepening in her face, then, impatient, roused myself and walked over to the laboratory. Westover looked up as I pushed aside the screen.

"Will you drive with us?" I asked. "The sun's out."

He declined, peering at me through his glass mask.

"Come on, Jim," I urged. "You've inhaled enough poison for one day. Take off your mask and wash your hands and drive us out to High Bridge. I'll telephone to the stable if you say the word, and they'll hook up the new four. Is it a go?"

"No," he said coldly, and turned on his heel, lifting a test tube to the light.

He was more taciturn and a trifle uglier than usual. I watched him for a moment warming the test tube over a burner, then without further parley replaced the screen, closed the double glass doors, and walked back to Geraldine.

"Doesn't Jim care to come?" she asked.

I said that her husband appeared to be absorbed in his work.

"Very well," she said, with airy composure; "trot along, Dicky—and if you see a bunch of jonquils growing on Fifth Avenue, you may pick them for me—or for that pretty girl you met at Lakewood—"

"I'll send you a bunch as big as a bushel."

"A bushel of flowers is as compromising as a declaration," she said. "Send them to her."

"There's only one way to settle it," I said; "I'll send them to the loveliest girl in the world—shall I?"

She assented, laughing uncertainly.

"I think I'll pay Jim a little call," she said, rising from the piano and walking slowly toward the laboratory.

A few moments later as I passed down the broad stairway I heard Westover's penetrating voice: "Let that glass tube alone, Geraldine! Why the devil can't you keep your hands off things when you come in here?"

I lingered for a while in the hallway, thinking that she might change her mind and come down, for she had left the laboratory to her husband, and I heard her moving about in her own apartment. She did not come, and after a little while I left the house, a sense of apprehension depressing me.

* * *

The asphalt of Fifth Avenue was still wet with the first warm rain of April, but the sun glittered on window and pavement and flashed along the polished panels of carriages crowding the avenue from curb to curb. A breath of spring had set the sparrows chattering and chirping; the movement of the throng, the bright gowns, the fresh faces of young girls, and the endless façades of glass reflecting it—all were pleasant to me, a man sensitive to impressions.

And so in the pale sunshine I sauntered on through the throng, now idling curiously by some shop window whither a display of jewels or curios attracted me, now strolling on again content with the soft color in sky and sunlight.

I found a florist whose shop windows were filled with thickets of fragrant, fragile spring flowers; and every little scented blossom that I touched, choosing the freshest, nodded to the voiceless cadence of a name repeated—and: "Geraldine! Geraldine!" they nodded, so confidently, so sweetly, that what was I to do but send them to her?

And so I sauntered on again, threading the throng, half-minded to turn back, yet ever tempted on by idleness, until above me the twin spires of the cathedral glimmered, all silvered in the shimmering blue.

Halting, undecided, I presently became aware of an old man, his withered hands crossed before him, standing quite patiently under the cathedral terrace. Before him on the sidewalk rested a basket draped with a brilliant rug or two and heaped with tawdry rubbish—scarlet fezzes, slippers of spangled leather, tasseled charms of gilt, flimsy striped fabrics—all the worthless flummery known as "Oriental" to the good peoples of the West.

Few stopped to look; no one bought. As I passed him his dimmed gaze met mine; all the wistfulness of the very poor, all the mystery of the very, very old, was in his eyes. Moved by impulse, perhaps, I spoke to him in a low voice, using the Turkish language.

A dull animation came into his misty eyes.

"Allahou Ekber," he muttered, in a trembling voice; "it is sweet to hear your words, my son."

"Mussulman," I said, "who are you who recite the Tekbir here under the spires of a Roman church?"

"Is there harm in bearing witness to the glory of God here under the minarets of your cathedral?" he asked humbly.

"Spire and minaret are one to Him," I said. "Who are you, Mussulman?"

"My name is Khassar," he said; "my nation Eighur; my Iort is the Issig-Kul; Baïon-Aoul my clan. I am an Eighur Turk, a Khodja; and I am able to write the Turkish language in Arabic and in Eighur-Mongol characters."

"Reverend father," I said, full of astonishment and pity, "how should a Khodja of the Baïon-Aoul come to this? Even the Tekrin horseman halts at the sea."

"It is written," he said feebly, "that we belong to God and we return to Him."

Troubled, I stood there on the sidewalk, oblivious to the knot of idlers around us, curious to hear two men so different conversing in a common tongue.

I wished to give him something, yet did not venture to humiliate him without pretense of buying.

"Here is my card," I said, "on which is written my name and where I live. Bring me these rugs to-night, ata. I wish to buy."

"You do not desire them," he said, shaking his head. "You know the East; you understand these rugs; you know they are worthless, acid-washed, singed, rubbed with pumice, smoked—every vile Armenian practice used! You know the dyes are aniline; that they are loosely tied, hastily and flimsily woven by Armenian dogs and sons of dogs. You mean kindness; you have done me enough by speaking to me."

He passed his trembling hand over his ragged beard.

"You who know carpets and love them," he quavered; "listen attentively. I have a strip to show—not here—but I could bring it."

"Bring it," I said gently.

He fumbled in the pocket of his tattered coat and presently brought to light a scrap of paper on which was scrawled some Persian characters.

"It is such a carpet as I have never seen," he said; "there is nothing in our history or our traditions to teach us the meaning of this carpet—nothing save that it is an Eighur rug inscribed in Persian and in an unknown script. I have traced the characters in a single cartouche. Read, my son."

And I read, translating freely:

> "Ten thousand thousand stars shine down on Babylon.
> The desert well reflects but one."

"I will bring the carpet," he said, after a silence. "I do not know its value; it has no beauty any longer; only the ghost of ancient splendor remains in the thin knots clinging to warp and weft. And it is old, my son, older than tradition. Upon it there is not one sign to teach us the mystery of its meaning."

He peered at me with his old, sad eyes, earnestly.

"I will bring it," he said. "Go with Ali, thou fair comrade of Hassan."

"May the Blessed Companions intervene for you," I said.

And so we parted, gravely and with circumstance, I to stroll homeward, touched, musing curiously upon this carpet of which a nomad Mussulman could make nothing. The Persian verse from the cartouche interested me, too, the refrain lingering persistently in my memory:

> "Ten thousand thousand stars shine down on Babylon.
> The desert well reflects but one."

Never before, save on the imperial carpet known as Belshazzar's Rug, had I encountered any inscription mentioning Babylon. So, at the first glance, the nomad's rug should have some value. But speculation was futile—surely I ought to have learned that if unnumbered disappointments could teach me anything.

Thinking of these things, I passed along the noble avenue, retracing my steps to the big dusky house standing alone, with two old trees to guard it—relics, like the mansion, of the great city's infancy—the last old dwelling left marooned amid the arid wastes of commerce. Here my cousin and his wife lived with me in winter; I with them at their Lenox home in summer.

A brougham or two at the curb before the house warned me of clients waiting or of visitors for Geraldine—doubtless the latter, for it was now past five.

Under the circumstances I went in to second Geraldine—for Westover never troubled himself to be civil to her friends.

There were people there, and tea—and a pretty, wordless welcome from Geraldine.

The violet-tinted April dusk brought candlelight; people went away and others came; then, one by one, they left, and we were alone, Geraldine and I—and the new moon shining through the frail curtains. For a long time we talked together, aimlessly, of this and that which mattered nothing to anybody. A maid entered to draw the curtains. When she left, Geraldine laughed and picked up a cluster of yellow jonquils.

"Your courage failed you, after all," she said; "the loveliest woman in the world must go without my flowers to-night."

"She has them," I retorted.

"Do you mean me, Dick?" she said under her breath.

"Did you doubt it?"

She bowed her head. Silence, ever waiting to ensnare us, crept like a shadow in between us. And I would not have it.

"An old man is to bring a rug to-night," I said abruptly.

Geraldine stirred in her armchair, repeating in a low voice:

> "Ten thousand thousand stars shine down on Babylon.
> The desert well reflects but one. Abaddon none."

Bolt upright in my chair I listened, incredulous of my own ears.

"Where on earth did you hear that?" I demanded.

"I read it on Belshazzar's Rug in cuneiform with the Kufic key," she answered, watching me.

"You—all alone—interpreted that?" I asked, astounded.

"Yes. It is the cuneiform inscription in the gold cartouche."

Profound astonishment left me silent. She lay back in her chair with a little laugh of pure excitement.

"After you went out," she said, "I was horribly lonely, and I thought of you, and then I thought about the work you loved—the cuneiforms—and—as Jim did not seem to need me in the laboratory—I thought to myself: 'Suppose—suppose by luck I could unravel the inscription on the gold cartouche! Dick would be the happiest man in the world.' And then—your—your flowers came, and I sat for a while alone with them. Then, on impulse, I jumped up and took the Kufic tables and all the combinations that you and I had tried together, and I slipped upstairs to the marble room and knelt down before Belshazzar's Rug. O Dick! the Tree of Heaven seemed to quiver in every jeweled branch and leaf!—it was only the draught from the closing door that moved the rug, but the mystic tree swayed there as the folds of the carpet moved, and I seemed to feel the mystery of the Prophet's Paradise stealing into me, penetrating me like the incense of forbidden wine—and I—I felt very Eastern and very pagan, kneeling there.

"It was strange, too; the intricate Kufic key seemed to be falling into place of its own impulse, symbol after symbol promising a linked symmetry of sense, until, almost before I was conscious of the miracle, it had been wrought there in the marble room; and my eyes were opened; and I, kneeling before the Tree of Heaven, read quite clearly what is written in the gold cartouche on the great carpet of Belshazzar. Dick! I prayed so hard that I might read it. And I have read it—for *you!*"

In the eloquence of her emotion she had risen, holding out both hands to me; I caught them, crushing them to my lips.

Ominous pulsating silence grew between us; her fingers relaxed and her hands fell from my lips. The stillness, intense, absolute, became a tension, a growing resistless force pressing us apart, slowly, inexorably driving me back step by step against the silk-hung wall, which I reached for, groping, steadying myself.

Never before had we been so swayed, so thrilled; never before had we been so reckless of the peril. Over us a magic snare had fallen, and we had evaded it—an unseen and delicate web, enmeshing us, drawing us together limb to limb, body to body, soul to soul, there on the kindling edges of destruction.

* * *

She sank back into the deep seat by the window, her white hands tightening on the gilded foliation of the chair's carved arms. And I saw how pale her face was and how her dark eyes were fixed steadily upon the floor as though destruction was a pit whose edge lay at her feet.

Presently I became aware that the world outside the curtained windows was moving still—had perhaps never halted on its way to wait upon our fate. And, crossing the room, I raised the shade and saw the new moon, low in the sky, kneeling amid the watching stars. Yellow rays from a street lamp illuminated the old trees' foliage, edging with palest fire the tracery of newborn leaves, tufting each stem and twig, exquisite, delicately formal as the leafy labyrinths of the Tree of Heaven spreading above the flowery field of Belshazzar's Rug.

* * *

Khassar the nomad had come and gone, and his rug hung in the marble room, pale as the tinted shadow cast by the great carpet of Belshazzar.

The nomad's rug was clean but very ancient, and so worn, so time-eaten to the very warp, that the Kherdeh was all but obliterated in the metnih. But outside of that, between the outside band and the ara, or central line, there were traces of ancient glory and dimmed outlines of design; and I saw the twelve cartouches inscribed alternately in Persian and in cuneiform characters. There, too, were the worn remains of floral thickets haunted of beast and bird, intricate allegories, chronicles in color and symbol, every leaf, every blossom, every creature fraught with mystic meaning; and there also, still faintly to be made out, the shadowy foliage of the Tree of Heaven.

"How much did you pay for that ghost of a rug?" demanded Westover, who had followed me upstairs after dressing for dinner.

When I told him he shrugged his shoulders, but made no comment. A moment later Geraldine entered, and his small eyes, no longer furtive, became fixed and dull.

"They say in the East," I remarked, "that when all color is gone from an Eighur rug a lost soul takes it for its abode. Eighur women are supposed to have souls occasionally, and to lose them now and then."

"There are plenty of lost souls in town," observed Westover; "no doubt you'll have your choice of tenants for your carpet—or," he added, staring at space, "if you like I'll provide you."

I did not understand his remark, but it left a vaguely sinister impression. Geraldine, standing between us, her white fingers linked behind her, looked up at me very gravely.

"Do you know," she said, "that I am convinced that I wove that rug some centuries ago?"

"I have no doubt of it," I replied, smiling.

"Do you doubt it, Jim?" she asked gayly.

He did not reply.

"As a matter of fact," I said, "it was always believed that a young girl who dared to weave the Tree of Heaven into an Eighur carpet died when her task was ended—her entire physical and spiritual vitality entering into the sacred tree and infusing it with mystic splendor."

"Oh, I died as you say," observed Geraldine gravely.

"I don't see that you infused much physical or spiritual splendor into that rug," observed Westover.

"I must die again, you know, Jim, and bring all its vanished beauty back," she said gayly. "Shall I, Dick?—and leave you a priceless carpet as my bequest and monument?"

Westover turned on his heel, fidgeting with his collar. Recently his neck had grown fat behind the ears.

A few moments later dinner was announced.

We lingered late over dinner, I remember. Jim drank heavily—a habit which both Geraldine and I had long since left unnoticed, she shrinking from the sullen rebuff certain to follow even a playful protest, I understanding the utter hopelessness of interference. His mind, already shaken, would one day shatter, and the dreadful price be paid.

As he sat there sousing walnuts in port, in his altered features and swollen hands I seemed to divine something malicious and patient and powerful—that indescribable physical menace one feels in the inert brooding eye of the mentally and spiritually crippled.

When Geraldine rose he stood up unsteadily. After she had gone he lighted a cigar and turned his bloodshot eyes on me.

"Is that wine expensive?" he demanded, pointing to Geraldine's half-empty glass.

"Rather," I said.

He picked up the glass, examined it, sniffing at the contents.

"It's poor claret," he said. "Taste it. It's pure poison, I tell you."

"I'm sorry," I said indifferently.

Again he sniffed it. "Faugh!" he sneered, and threw it into the fireplace behind him. Then he got on his feet, heavily, muttering to himself, and stumbled off through the drawing-room.

For a while I sat there amid the shaded candles, staring at space. But I could not read the future pictured there amid the empty chairs and the flowers, already drooping in each crystal vase.

When at length I roused myself and went upstairs, passing her apartment I heard her singing to herself, and I wondered that she could.

I paused on the gallery stairway to listen; and she could not have heard my footsteps on the thick deep carpeting, yet she came to the door and opened it, looking up at me where I stood.

"You are going to the marble room. May I come and help you?" she asked sweetly. And as I was silent, she said again: "Let me be happy, won't you, Dick? Let me be where you are."

"Have I ever avoided you, Geraldine?"

I descended the steps, she laid her hand lightly on my arm, and together we mounted the stairway toward the gallery.

"I was singing a Hillah tent song when you passed," she said, "partly because I was lonely, and partly"—she hesitated, looking around at me—"partly because I've come to the conclusion, Dick, that I was once at Belshazzar's feast in Cadimirra—for there's a great deal of wickedness in me—you'd never believe it, would you?"

She smiled at me so innocently, so adorably, that I laughed outright.

"I've heard that the maids of Babilu-Ki had a bowing acquaintance with the devil," I said. "Even an Eighur girl nodded pleasantly to Erlik now and then—according to the chronicles of the Tekrins."

"Oh, they surely did," she said. And, "Thank you, Dick," she added, as we reached the gallery; "when I am an old woman you must help me up the steep places."

"It is you who help me," I said lightly.

She stood, resting her arm on the table while I gathered up the mass of papers containing our cuneiform combinations and the Kufic key.

"All that is useless," she said suddenly. Her manner and smile had altered.

I looked up in surprise, and at the same instant she pushed the papers from beneath my hands.

"The memory of things forgotten centuries ago has returned to me," she said feverishly. "I am a pagan again. It was Istar who first taught my hands to weave and my fingers to tie the Sehna knot. I wove that carpet; what I have woven there I can read. Why do you laugh? Will you believe me if I translate the mystery of each inscription as easily as I read the gold cartouche? Come; we shall never need those papers again."

What new caprice was this? She was smiling, almost fixedly, and I thought that there was something in her overflushed face and in the starlike brilliancy of her eyes not quite normal. At the same moment the electric lights in the laboratory went out. Westover was evidently in there. I waited, expecting him to appear, but he did not. Again I reached for the papers, but Geraldine scattered them with a quick sweep of her hand.

"Won't you believe me? Won't you let me try?" she repeated almost impatiently.

With a quick movement she bent forward past me and shut off the lights in the gallery where we stood. Another second, and the lights in the marble room broke out fiercely; and there, full in the dazzling glory, I saw the great carpet of Belshazzar hanging, and beside it the Eighur rug—a pallid shadow on the wall.

Geraldine, hands clasped to her scarlet mouth, dark eyes fixed, moved forward slowly, opalescent tints flashing on her smooth bare arms and shoulders, her head a delicate silhouette against the glare.

I followed, pausing at her side, and we stood silently before the miracle, the great folds gently stirring in some unfelt current; and I saw the upper branches of the Tree of Heaven sway, and a thousand leaves, all glistening, quiver and subside.

"One can almost hear the rustling of the leaves," I whispered.

"I hear more than that," she murmured. "I hear my soul bidding me good-by."

She smiled dreamily, turning to the faded Eighur carpet, and stepping back one pace, dropped her left arm, clasping my hand in hers.

"It was I who wove that carpet—I, maid of the Issig-Kul—and it was you, beloved of Hassan, who inspired it."

"What are you saying, Geraldine?" I began uneasily; "where did you ever hear my name linked with the name of Hassan?"

Her palm was burning hot, her eyes too bright. The fever of caprice possessed her, and her imagination was running riot.

There was a silence, through which a distant sound penetrated—the faint ring of glass somewhere in the laboratory. Westover was tying on his crystal mask.

She heard it, too, and she turned, looking me full in the eyes.

"Dick," she said, "he has slain my body. My soul is bidding me good-by."

"It is my own that he is dragging to destruction, not yours," I muttered.

But she only clasped my hand tighter, the fixed smile stamped on her lips.

"Listen," she whispered, raising her arm. "This is what is written in the rose cartouche on the Eighur carpet that I made:

'Roses of Babylon: Ashes of roses in Abaddon.'

Love and its awful penalty, Dick—and the warning I wove, coffined in cryptogram! Listen again. The cartouche below was once topaz—for I wove it—I!

'All Paradise the cost:
Warp and weft for souls so lost.'

—Mine, Dick, mine!—lost in loving as I loved, centuries since. I have no soul; I have never had any since I lost it then. It is there, tenanting the phantom of an Eighur carpet. Do you not understand? There is my faded monument and refuge—that magic-woven sanctuary—that hiding place from hell!"

Her little feverish fingers tightened convulsively in mine; the color flamed in her cheeks. Suddenly she crushed our clasped hands to her heart, and I felt it leaping madly.

"Geraldine," I stammered, "what is all this ghastly nonsense? Are you ill?"

"Listen! Listen!" she whispered; "the next cartouche was blue—the lost Persian blue! I know; why should I not know—I who wove it centuries ago? And thus it reads, O thou whom I loved to my destruction—thou whom I love!

'Time and the Guest
Shall meet me twice—once East, once West.'

"Ah, prophetess was I by Istar's favor—seeing I died for love. Do you not understand, Dick? Time and the Guest!—the Guest is Death—the Guest we all must entertain one day—and I twice—once in the East, once here in the West—here, now!"

"Geraldine, are you mad?" I whispered; "look at me!—turn and look at me, I say!"

But she shivered in my arms, whispering that she was ransoming her soul and mine. A distant sound broke from the laboratory, and we listened.

"Hush, beloved," she said breathlessly; "the last cartouche is black! And this is written there:

'Soul, lotus-sealed,
Receive—thy—Paradise—'"

Her voice died out; a terrible pallor struck her face; she swayed where she stood, the smile frozen on her bloodless lips.

As I caught her to me, her head fell straight back and her body sank a dead weight in my arms. Then a dreadful thing occurred; the faded ancient tapestry glowed out like a live ember, kindling from end to end, brighter, fiercer, flaming into living fire; and the phantom Tree of Heaven, flashing, superbly jeweled, burst into magnificent florescence.

Blinded, almost stupefied, I staggered back, but the straining cry died in my throat as a voice is strangled in dreadful dreams. Again I strove to shout. The rug, glowing like a living ember, slowly faded before my eyes. Suddenly the last spark went out in a shower of whitening ashes.

Again I strove to cry out: "Jim! Jim!" but my lips stiffened with horror as I listened. For he was somewhere there in the darkness, laughing.

"It was in her wine," he chuckled—"and I saw her kiss the glass and look at you!—and you, there, staring at nothing! Stare at it now!"

And again: "Do you think I have never watched her?—and you? Now she's in hell, and we'll race for her on even terms once more."

Silence: a low, insane laugh, cut by a report and the crash of glass as he fell, shattering his masked face upon the floor.

After a long while I spoke, listening intently. Then I took up my burden.

And there was no sound save the soft stirring of her silken gown as I bore her through the darkness, my cold lips pressed to hers.

* * *

He has never returned to America, but now that the time has come for me to fulfill my part, I do so, setting down what I know and what occult information I have received in letters from him, of the strange fate which overtook, separately, each and every man present at that farewell dinner at the Lenox Club.

My own fate is stranger still—to record these facts and take my position as his historian and his disciple. ❋

The Sign of Venus

In the card room the game, which had started from a chance suggestion, bid fair to develop into an all-night *séance*: the young foreign diplomat had shed his coat and lighted a fresh cigar; somebody threw a handkerchief over the face of the clock, and a sleepy club servant took reserve orders for two dozen siphons and other details.

"That lets me out," said Hetherford, rising from his chair with a nod at the dealer. He tossed his cards on the table, settled side obligations with the man on his left, yawned, and put on his hat.

Somebody remonstrated: "It's only two o'clock, Hetherford; you have no white man's burden sitting up for you at home."

But Hetherford shook his head, smiling.

So a servant removed his chair, another man cut in, the dealer dealt cards all around. Presently from somewhere in the smoke haze came a voice, "Hearts." And a quiet voice retorted, "I double it."

Hetherford lingered a moment, then turned on his heel, sauntered out across the hallway and down the stairs into the court, refusing with a sign the offered cab.

Breathing deeply, yawning once or twice, he looked up at the stars. The night air refreshed him; he stood a moment, thoughtfully contemplating his half-smoked cigar, then tossed it away and stepped out into the street.

The street was quiet and deserted; darkened brownstone mansions stared at him through somber windows as he passed; his footsteps echoed across the pavement like the sound of footsteps following.

His progress was leisurely; the dreary monotony of the house fronts soothed him. He whistled a few bars of a commonplace tune, crossed the deserted avenue under the electric lamps, and entered the dimly lighted street beyond.

Here all was silence; the doors of many houses were boarded up—sign that their tenants had migrated to the country. No shadowy cat fled along the iron railings at his approach; no night watchman prowled in deserted dooryards or peered at him from obscurity.

Strolling at ease, thoughts nowhere, he had traversed half the block, when an opening door and a glimmer of light across the sidewalk attracted his attention.

As he approached the house from whence the light came, a figure suddenly appeared on the stoop—a girl in a white ball gown—hastily descending the stone steps. Gaslight from the doorway tinted her bared arms and shoulders. She bent her graceful head and gazed earnestly at Hetherford.

"I beg your pardon," she almost whispered; "might I ask you to help me?"

Hetherford stopped and wheeled short.

"I—I really beg your pardon," she said, "but I am in such distress. Could I ask you to find me a cab?"

"A cab!" he repeated uncertainly; "why, yes—I will with pleasure—" He turned and looked up and down the deserted street, slowly lifting his hand to his short mustache. "If you are in a hurry," he said, "I had better go to the nearest stables—"

"But there is something more," she said, in a tremulous voice; "could you get me a wrap—a cloak—anything to throw over my gown?"

He looked up at her, bewildered. "Why, I don't believe I—" he began, then fell silent before her troubled gaze. "I'll do anything I can for you," he said abruptly. "I have a raincoat at the club—if your need is urgent—"

"It is urgent; but there is something else—something more urgent, more difficult for me to ask you. I must go to Willow Brook—I must go now, to-night! And I—I have no money."

"Do you mean Willow Brook in Westchester?" he asked, astonished. "There is no train at this hour of the morning!"

"Then—then what am I to do?" she faltered. "I cannot stay another moment in that house."

After a silence he said: "Are you afraid of anybody in that house?"

"There is nobody in the house," she said with a shudder; "my mother is in Westchester; all the household are there. I—I came back—a few moments ago—unexpectedly—" She stammered and winced under his keen scrutiny; then the pallor of utter despair came into her cheeks, and she hid her white face in her hands.

Hetherford watched her for a moment.

"I don't exactly understand," he said gently, "but I'll do anything I can for you. I'll go to the club and get my raincoat; I'll go to the stables and get a cab; I haven't any money with me, but it would take only a few minutes for me to drive to the club and get some. . . . Please don't be distressed; I'll do anything you desire."

She dropped her arms with a hopeless gesture.

"But you say there is no train!"

"You could drive to the house of some of your friends—"

"No, no! Oh, my friends must never know of this!"

"I see," he said gravely.

"No, you don't see," she said unsteadily. "The truth is that I am almost frightened to death."

"Can you not tell me what has frightened you so?"

"If I tried to tell you, you would think me mad—you would indeed—"

"Try," he said soothingly.

"Why—why, it startled me to find myself in this house," she began. "You see, I didn't expect to come here; I didn't really want to come here," she added piteously. "Oh, it is simply dreadful to come—like this!" She glanced fearfully over her shoulder at the lighted doorway above, then turned to Hetherford as though dazed.

"Tell me," he said in a quiet voice.

"Yes—I'll tell you. At first it was all dark—but I must have known I was in my own room, for I felt around on the dresser for the matches and lighted a candle. And when I saw that it was truly my own room, and when I caught sight of my own face in the mirror, it terrified me—" She pressed her fingers to her cheeks with a shudder. "Then I ran downstairs and lighted the gas in the hall and peered into the mirror; and I saw a face there—a face like my own—"

Pale, voiceless, she leaned on the bronze balustrade, fair head drooping, lids closed.

Presently, eyes still closed, she said: "You will not leave me alone here—will you—" Her voice died to a whisper.

"No—of course not," he replied slowly.

There was an interval of silence; she passed her hand across her eyes and raised her head, looking up at the stars.

"You see," she murmured, "I dare not be alone; I *dare* not lose touch with the living. I suppose you think me mad, but I am not; I am only stunned. Please stay with me."

"Of course," he said in a soothing voice. "Everything will come out all right—"

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly. I don't quite know what to say—how to reassure you and offer you any help—"

He fell silent, standing there on the sidewalk, worrying his short mustache. The situation was a new one to him.

"Suppose," he suggested, "that you try to take a little rest. I'll sit down on the steps—"

She looked at him in wide-eyed alarm. "Do you mean that I should go into that house—alone!"

"Well—you oughtn't to stand on the steps all night. It is nearly three o'clock. You are frightened and nervous. Really you must go in and—"

"Then you must come, too," she said desperately. "This nightmare is more than I can endure alone. I'm not a coward; none of my race is. But I need a living being near me. Will you come?"

He bowed. She turned, hastily gathering her filmy gown, and mounted the shadowy steps without a sound; and he followed leisurely, even perhaps warily, every sense alert.

He was prepared to see the end of this encounter—see it through to an explanation if it took all summer. Of the situation, however, and of her, he had so far ventured no theory. The type of woman and the situation were perfectly new to him. He was aware that anything might happen in New York, and, closing the heavy front door, he was ready for it.

The hall gas jets were burning brightly, and in the darkened drawing-room he could distinguish the heavy outlines of furniture cased in dust coverings.

She asked him to strike a match and light the sconces in the drawing-room, and he did so, curiosity now thoroughly aroused.

As the gas flared up, shrouded pictures and furniture sprang into view surrounding him, and in the dusk of the room beyond he saw a ray of light glimmering on the foliated carving of a gilded harp.

Slowly he turned to the girl beside him. A warm shadow dimmed her delicate features, yet they were the loveliest he had ever looked upon.

Suddenly he understood the mute message of her eyes: "My imprudence places me at your mercy."

"Your helplessness places me at yours," he said aloud, scarcely conscious that he had spoken.

At that a bright flush transfigured her. "I trusted you the moment I saw you," she said impulsively. "Do you mind sitting there opposite me? I shall take this chair—rather near you—"

She sank into an armchair; and, touched and a trifle amused, he seated himself, at a little nod from her, awaiting her further pleasure.

She lay there for a minute or two without speaking, rounded arms resting on the gilt arms of the chair, eyes thoughtfully studying him.

"I've simply got to tell you everything," she said at length.

"It can do no harm, I think," he replied pleasantly.

"No; no harm. The harm has been done. Yet, with you sitting there so near me, I am not frightened now. It is curious," she mused, "that I should feel no apprehension now. And yet—and yet—"

She leaned toward him, dropping her linked fingers in her lap.

"Tell me, did you ever hear of the Sign of Venus?—the *Signum Veneris*?" she asked.

"I've heard of it—yes," he replied, surprised. And as she said nothing, he went on: "The distinguished gentleman who occupies the chair of Applied Psychics at the university lectures on the Sign of Venus, I believe."

"Did you attend the lectures?" she asked calmly.

He said he had not, smiling a trifle.

"I did."

"They were probably amusing," he ventured.

"Not very. Psychic phenomena bored me; I went during Lent. Psychic phenomena—" She hesitated, embarrassed at his amusement. "I suppose you laugh at that sort of thing."

"No, I don't laugh at it. Queer things occur, they say. All I know is that I myself have never seen anything happen that could not be explained by natural laws."

"I have," she said.

He bent his head in polite acquiescence.

"I went to the lectures," she said. "I am not very intellectual; nothing he said interested me very much—which was, of course, suitable for a Lenten amusement."

She leaned a little nearer, small hands tightly interlaced on her knee.

"His lecture on the Sign of Venus was the last." She lifted a white finger, drawing the imaginary *Signum Veneris* in the air. Hetherford nodded gravely.

"The lecture," she continued, "ended with an explanation of the Sign of Venus—how, contemplating it by starlight, one might pass into that physical unconsciousness which leaves the mind free to control the soul."

She held out her left hand toward him. On a stretched finger a ring glistened, mounted with the Sign of Venus blazing in brilliants.

"I had this made specially," she said; "not that I had any particular desire to test it—no curiosity. It never occurred to me that here in New York one could—could—"

"What?" asked Hetherford dryly.

"—could leave one's own body at will."

"I don't believe it could be accomplished in New York," he said with great gravity. "And that's a pretty safe conclusion to come to, is it not?"

She dropped her eyes, silent for a moment, resting her delicate chin on the palm of her hand. Then she lifted her eyes to him calmly, and the direct beauty of her gaze disturbed him.

"No, it is not a safe conclusion to come to. Listen to me. Last night they gave a dance at the Willow Brook Hunt. It was nearly two o'clock this morning when I left the club house and started home across the lawn with my mother and the maid—"

"But how on earth could—" he began, then begged her pardon and waited.

She continued serenely: "The night was warm and lovely, and it was clear starlight. When I entered my room I sent the maid away and sat down by the open window. The scent of the flowers and the beauty of the night made me restless; I went downstairs, unbolted the door, and slipped out through the garden to the pergola. My hammock hung there, and I lay down in it, looking out at the stars."

She drew the ring from her finger, holding it out for him to see.

"The starlight caught the gems on the Sign of Venus," she said under her breath; "that was the beginning. And then—I don't know why—as I lay there idly turning the ring on my finger, I found myself saying, 'I must go to New York: I must leave my body here asleep in the hammock and go to my own room in Fifty-eighth Street.'"

A curious little chill passed over Hetherford.

"I said it again and again—I don't know why. I remember the ring glittered; I remember it grew brighter and brighter. And then—and then! I found myself upstairs in the dark, groping over the dresser for the matches."

Again that faint chill touched Hetherford.

"I was stupefied for a moment," she said tremulously; "then I suspected what I had done, and it frightened me. And when I lighted the candle, and saw it was truly my own room—and when I caught sight of my own face in the mirror—terror seized me; it was like a glimpse of something taken unawares. For, do you know that although in the glass I saw my own face, the face was not looking back at me." She dropped her head, crushing the ring in both hands. "The reflected face was far lovelier than mine; and it was mine, I think, yet it was not looking at me, and it moved when I did not move. I wonder—I wonder—"

The tension was too much. "If that be so," he said, steadying his voice—"if you saw a face in your mirror, the face was your own." He made an impatient gesture, rising to his feet at the same moment. "All that you have told me can be explained," he said.

"How can it? At this very moment I am asleep in my hammock."

"We will deal with that later," he said, smiling down at her. "Where is there a looking-glass?"

"There is one in the hallway." She rose, slipping the ring on her finger, and led the way to where an oval gilt mirror hung partly covered with dust cloths.

He cast aside the coverings. "Now look into the glass," he said gayly.

She raised her head and faced the mirror for an instant.

"Come here," she whispered; and he stepped behind her, looking over her shoulder.

In the glass, as though reflected, he saw her face, but *the face was in profile!*

A shiver passed over him from head to foot.

"Did I not tell you?" she whispered. "Look! See, the other face is moving, while I am still!"

"There's something wrong about the glass, of course," he muttered; "it's defective."

"But who is that in the glass?"

"It is you—your profile. I don't exactly understand. Good Lord! It's turning away from us!"

She shrank against the wall, wide-eyed, breathing rapidly.

"There is no use in our being frightened," he said, scarcely knowing what he uttered. "This is Fifty-eighth Street, New York, 1903." He shook his shoulders, squaring them, and forced a smile. "Don't be frightened; there's an explanation for all this. You are not asleep in Westchester; you are here in your own house. You mustn't tremble so. Give me your hand a moment."

She laid her hand in his obediently; it shook like a leaf. He held it firmly, touching the fluttering pulse.

"You are certainly no spirit," he said, smiling; "your hand is warm and yielding. Ghosts don't have hands like that, you know."

Her fingers lay in his, quite passive now, but the pulse quickened.

"The explanation of it all is this," he said: "You have had a temporary suspension of consciousness, during which time you, without being aware of what you were doing, came to town from Willow Brook. You believe you went to the dance at the Hunt Club, but probably you did not. Instead, during a lapse of consciousness, you went to the station, took a train to town, came straight to your own house—" He hesitated.

"Yes," she said, "I have a key to the door. Here it is." She drew it from the bosom of her gown; he took it triumphantly.

"You simply awoke to consciousness while you were groping for the matches. That is all there is to it; and you need not be frightened at all!" he announced.

"No, not frightened," she said, shaking her head; "only—only I wonder how I can get back. I've tried to fix my mind on my ring—on the Sign of Venus—I cannot seem to—"

"But that's nonsense!" he protested cheerfully. "That ring has nothing to do with the matter."

"But it brought me here! Truly I am asleep in my hammock. Won't you believe it?"

"No; and you mustn't, either," he said impatiently. "Why, just now I explained to you—"

"I know," she said, looking down at the ring on her hand; "but you are wrong—truly you are."

"I am not wrong," he said, laughing. "It was only a dream—the dance, the return, the hammock—all these were parts of a dream so intensely real that you cannot shake it off at once."

"Then—then *who* was that we saw in the mirror?"

"Let us try it again," he said confidently. She suffered him to lead her again to the mirror; again they peered into its glimmering depths, heads close together.

A second's breathless silence, then she caught his hand in both of hers with a low cry; for the strange profile was slowly turning toward them a face of amazing beauty—her own face transfigured, radiantly glorified.

"My soul!" she gasped, and would have fallen at his feet had he not held her and supported her to the stairs, where she sank down, hiding her face in her arms.

As for him, he was terribly shaken; he strove to speak, to reason with her, with himself, but a stupor chained body and mind, and he only leaned there on the newel post, vaguely aware of his own helplessness.

Far away in the night the bells of a church began striking the hour—one, two, three, four. Presently the distant rattle of a wagon sounded. The city stirred in its slumbers.

He found himself bending beside her, her passive hands in his once more, and he was saying: "As a matter of fact, all this is quite capable of an explanation. Don't be distressed—please don't be frightened or sad. We've both had some sort of hallucination, that's all—really that is all."

"I am not frightened now," she said dreamily. "I am quite sure that—that I am not dead. I am only asleep in my hammock. When I awake—"

Again, in spite of himself, he shivered.

"Will you do one more thing for me?" she asked.

"Yes—a million."

"Only one. It is unreasonable, it is perhaps silly—and I have no right to ask—"

"Ask it," he begged.

"Then—then, will you go to Willow Brook? Now?"

"Now?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes." She looked down at him with the shadow of a smile touching lips and eyes. "I am asleep in the hammock; I sleep very, very soundly—and very, very late into the morning. They may not find me there for a long while. So would you mind going to Willow Brook to awaken me?"

"I—I—but you do not expect me to leave you here and find you in Westchester!" he stammered.

"You need not go," she said quietly. "If you will telephone to the house and ask somebody to go out to the pergola—"

"No," he said, "I will go; I will go anywhere on earth for you."

He stood up, his senses in a whirl. She rose, too, leaning lightly on the balustrade.

"Thank you," she said sweetly. "When you awake me, give me this." She held out the *Signum Veneris*; and he took it, and bending his head slowly, raised it to his lips.

* * *

It was almost morning when he entered his own house. In a dull trance he dressed, turned again to the stairs, and crept out into the shadowy street.

People began to pass him; an early electric tram whizzed up Forty-second Street as he entered the railway station. Presently he found himself in a car, clutching his ticket in one hand, her ring in the other.

"It is I who am mad, not she," he muttered as the train glided from the station, through the long yard, dim in morning mist, where green and crimson lanterns still sparkled faintly.

Again he pressed the *Signum Veneris* to his lips. "It is I who am mad—love mad!" he whispered as the far treble warning of the whistle aroused him and sent him stumbling out into the soft fresh morning air.

The rising sun smote him full in the eyes as he came in sight of the club house among the still green trees, and the dew on the lawn flashed like the gems of the *Signum Veneris* on the ring he held so tightly.

Across the club house lawn stood another house, circled with gardens in full bloom; and to the left, among young trees, the white columns of a pergola glistened, tinted with rose from the early sun.

There was not a soul astir as he crossed the lawn and entered the garden, brushing the dew from overweighted blossoms as he passed.

Suddenly, at a turn in the path, he came upon the pergola, and saw a brilliant hammock hanging in the shadow.

Over the hammock's fringe something light and fluffy fell in folds like the billowy frills of a ball gown. He stumbled forward, dazed, incredulous, and stood trembling for an instant.

Then, speechless, he sank down beside her, and dropped the ring into the palm of her half-closed and unconscious hand.

A ray of sunlight fell across her hair; slowly her blue eyes unclosed, smiling divinely.

And in her partly open palm the Sign of Venus glimmered like dew silvering a budding rose. ❋

The Case of Mr. Helmer

He had really been too ill to go; the penetrating dampness of the studio, the nervous strain, the tireless application, all had told on him heavily. But the feverish discomfort in his head and lungs gave him no rest; it was impossible to lie there in bed and do nothing; besides, he did not care to disappoint his hostess. So he managed to crawl into his clothes, summon a cab, and depart. The raw night air cooled his head and throat; he opened the cab window and let the snow blow in on him.

When he arrived he did not feel much better, although Catharine was glad to see him. Somebody's wife was allotted to him to take in to dinner, and he executed the commission with that distinction of manner peculiar to men of his temperament.

When the women had withdrawn and the men had lighted cigars and cigarettes, and the conversation wavered between municipal reform and *contes drolatiques*, and the Boznovian *attaché* had begun an interminable story, and Count Fantozzi was emphasizing his opinion of women by joining the tips of his overmanicured thumb and forefinger and wafting spectral kisses at an annoyed Englishman opposite, Helmer laid down his unlighted cigar and, leaning over, touched his host on the sleeve.

"Hello! What's up, Philip?" said his host cordially; and Helmer, dropping his voice a tone below the sustained pitch of conversation, asked him the question that had been burning his feverish lips since dinner began.

To which his host replied, "What girl do you mean?" and bent nearer to listen.

"I mean the girl in the fluffy black gown, with shoulders and arms of ivory, and the eyes of Aphrodite."

His host smiled. "Where did she sit, this human wonder?"

"Beside Colonel Farrar."

"Farrar? Let's see"—he knit his brows thoughtfully, then shook his head. "I can't recollect; we're going in now and you can find her and I'll—"

His words were lost in the laughter and hum around them; he nodded an abstracted assurance at Helmer; others claimed his attention, and by the time he rose to signal departure he had forgotten the girl in black.

As the men drifted toward the drawing-rooms, Helmer moved with the throng. There were a number of people there whom he knew and spoke to, although through the increasing feverishness he could scarce hear himself speak. He was too ill to stay; he would find his hostess and ask the name of that girl in black, and go.

The white drawing-rooms were hot and over-thronged. Attempting to find his hostess, he encountered Colonel Farrar, and together they threaded their way aimlessly forward.

"Who is the girl in black, Colonel?" he asked; "I mean the one that you took in to dinner."

"A girl in black? I don't think I saw her."

"She sat beside you!"

"Beside *me?*" The Colonel halted, and his inquiring gaze rested for a moment on the younger man, then swept the crowded rooms.

"Do you see her now?" he asked.

"No," said Helmer, after a moment.

They stood silent for a little while, then parted to allow the Chinese minister thoroughfare—a suave gentleman, all antique silks, and a smile "thousands of years old." The minister passed, leaning on the arm of the general commanding at Governor's Island, who signaled Colonel Farrar to join them; and Helmer drifted again, until a voice repeated his name insistently, and his hostess leaned forward from the brilliant group surrounding her, saying: "What in the world is the matter, Philip? You look wretchedly ill."

"It's a trifle close here—nothing's the matter."

He stepped nearer, dropping his voice: "Catharine, who was that girl in black?"

"What girl?"

"She sat beside Colonel Farrar at dinner—or I thought she did—"

"Do you mean Mrs. Van Siclen? She is in white, silly!"

"No—the girl in black."

His hostess bent her pretty head in perplexed silence, frowning a trifle with the effort to remember.

"There were so many," she murmured; "let me see—it is certainly strange that I cannot recollect. Wait a moment! Are you sure she wore black? Are you *sure* she sat next to Colonel Farrar?"

"A moment ago I was certain—" he said, hesitating. "Never mind, Catherine; I'll prowl about until I find her."

His hostess, already partly occupied with the animated stir around her, nodded brightly; Helmer turned his fevered eyes and then his steps toward the cool darkness of the conservatories. But he found there a dozen people who greeted him by name, demanding not only his company but his immediate and undivided attention.

"Mr. Helmer might be able to explain to us what his own work means," said a young girl, laughing.

They had evidently been discussing his sculptured group, just completed for the new façade of the National Museum. Press and public had commented very freely on the work since the unveiling a week since; critics quarreled concerning the significance of the strange composition in marble. The group was at the same time repellent and singularly beautiful; but nobody denied its technical perfection. This was the sculptured group: A vaquero, evidently dying, lay in a loose heap among some desert rocks. Beside him, chin on palm, sat an exquisite winged figure, calm eyes fixed on the dying man. It was plain that death was near; it was stamped on the ravaged visage, on the collapsed frame. And yet, in the dying boy's eyes there was nothing of agony, no fear, only an intense curiosity as the lovely winged figure gazed straight into the glazing eyes.

"It may be," observed an attractive girl, "that Mr. Helmer will say with Mr. Gilbert,

"'It is really very clever,
But I don't know what it means.'"

Helmer laughed and started to move away. "I think I'd better admit that at once," he said, passing his hand over his aching eyes; but the tumult of protest blocked his retreat, and he was forced to find a chair under the palms and tree ferns. "It was merely an idea of mine," he protested, good-humoredly, "an idea that has haunted me so persistently that, to save myself further annoyance, I locked it up in marble."

"Demoniac obsession?" suggested a very young man, with a taste for morbid literature.

"Not at all," protested Helmer, smiling; "the idea annoyed me until I gave it expression. It doesn't bother me any more."

"You said," observed the attractive girl, "that you were going to tell us all about it."

"About the idea? Oh no, I didn't promise that—"

"Please, Mr. Helmer!"

A number of people had joined the circle; he could see others standing here and there among the palms, evidently pausing to listen.

"There is no logic in the idea," he said, uneasily—"nothing to attract your attention. I have only laid a ghost—"

He stopped short. The girl in black stood there among the others, intently watching him. When she caught his eye, she nodded with the friendliest little smile; and as he started to rise she shook her head and stepped back with a gesture for him to continue.

They looked steadily at one another for a moment.

"The idea that has always attracted me," he began slowly, "is purely instinctive and emotional, not logical. It is this: As long as I can remember I have taken it for granted that a person who is doomed to die, never dies utterly alone. We who die in our beds—or expect to—die surrounded by the living. So fall soldiers on the firing line; so end the great majority—never absolutely alone. Even in a murder, the murderer at least must be present. If not, something else is there.

"But how is it with those solitary souls isolated in the world—the lone herder who is found lifeless in some vast, waterless desert, the pioneer whose bones are stumbled over by the tardy pickets of civilization—and even those nearer us—here in our city—who are found in silent houses, in deserted streets, in the solitude of salt meadows, in the miserable desolation of vacant lands beyond the suburbs?"

The girl in black stood motionless, watching him intently.

"I like to believe," he went on, "that no living creature dies absolutely and utterly alone. I have thought that, perhaps in the desert, for instance, when a man is doomed, and there is no chance that he could live to relate the miracle, some winged sentinel from the uttermost outpost of Eternity, putting off the armor of invisibility, drops through space to watch beside him so that he may not die alone."

There was absolute quiet in the circle around him. Looking always at the girl in black, he said:

"Perhaps those doomed on dark mountains or in solitary deserts, or the last survivor at sea, drifting to certain destruction after the wreck has foundered, finds death no terror, being guided to it by those invisible to all save the surely doomed. That is really all that suggested the marble—quite illogical, you see."

In the stillness, somebody drew a long, deep breath; the easy reaction followed; people moved, spoke together in low voices; a laugh rippled up out of the darkness. But Helmer had gone, making his way through the half light toward a figure that moved beyond through the deeper shadows of the foliage—moved slowly and more slowly. Once she looked back, and he followed, pushing forward and parting the heavy fronds of fern and palm and masses of moist blossoms. Suddenly he came upon her, standing there as though waiting for him.

"There is not a soul in this house charitable enough to present me," he began.

"Then," she answered laughingly, "charity should begin at home. Take pity on yourself—and on me. I have waited for you."

"Did you really care to know me?" he stammered.

"Why am I here alone with you?" she asked, bending above a scented mass of flowers. "Indiscretion may be a part of valor, but it is the best part of—something else."

That blue radiance which a starless sky sheds lighted her white shoulders; transparent shadow veiled the contour of neck and cheeks.

"At dinner," he said, "I did not mean to stare so—but I simply could not keep my eyes from yours—"

"A hint that mine were on yours, too?"

She laughed a little laugh so sweet that the sound seemed part of the twilight and the floating fragrance. She turned gracefully, holding out her hand.

"Let us be friends," she said, "after all these years."

Her hand lay in his for an instant; then she withdrew it and dropped it caressingly upon a cluster of massed flowers.

"Forced bloom," she said, looking down at them, where her fingers, white as the blossoms, lay half buried. Then, raising her head, "You do not know me, do you?"

"Know you?" he faltered; "how could I know you? Do you think for a moment that I could have forgotten you?"

"Ah, you have not forgotten me!" she said, still with her wide smiling eyes on his; "you have not forgotten. There is a trace of me in the winged figure you cut in marble—not the features, not the massed hair, nor the rounded neck and limbs—but in the eyes. Who living, save yourself, can read those eyes?"

"Are you laughing at me?"

"Answer me; who alone in all the world can read the message in those sculptured eyes?"

"Can you?" he asked, curiously troubled.

"Yes; I, and the dying man in marble."

"What do you read there?"

"Pardon for guilt. You have foreshadowed it unconsciously—the resurrection of the soul. That is what you have left in marble for the mercilessly just to ponder on; that alone is the meaning of your work."

Through the throbbing silence he stood thinking, searching his clouded mind.

"The eyes of the dying man are your own," she said. "Is it not true?"

And still he stood there, groping, probing through dim and forgotten corridors of thought toward a faint memory scarcely perceptible in the wavering mirage of the past.

"Let us talk of your career," she said, leaning back against the thick foliage—"your success, and all that it means to you," she added gayly.

He stood staring at the darkness. "You have set the phantoms of forgotten things stirring and whispering together somewhere within me. Now tell me more; tell me the truth."

"You are slowly reading it in my eyes," she said, laughing sweetly. "Read and remember."

The fever in him seared his sight as he stood there, his confused gaze on hers.

"Is it a threat of hell you read in the marble?" he asked.

"No, nothing of destruction, only resurrection and hope of Paradise. Look at me closely."

"Who are you?" he whispered, closing his eyes to steady his swimming senses. "When have we met?"

"You were very young," she said under her breath—"and I was younger—and the rains had swollen the Canadian river so that it boiled amber at the fords; and I could not cross—alas!"

A moment of stunning silence, then her voice again: "I said nothing, not a word even of thanks when you offered aid. . . . I—was not too heavy in your arms, and the ford was soon passed—soon passed. That was very long ago." Watching him from shadowy sweet eyes, she said:

"For a day you knew the language of my mouth and my arms around you, there in the white sun glare of the river. For every kiss taken and retaken, given and forgiven, we must account—for every one, even to the last.

"But you have set a monument for us both, preaching the resurrection of the soul. Love is such a little thing—and ours endured a whole day long! Do you remember? Yet He who created love, designed that it should last a lifetime. Only the lost outlive it."

She leaned nearer:

"Tell me, you who have proclaimed the resurrection of dead souls, are you afraid to die?"

Her low voice ceased; lights broke out like stars through the foliage around them; the great glass doors of the ballroom were opening; the illuminated fountain flashed, a falling shower of silver. Through the outrush of music and laughter swelling around them, a clear far voice called "Françoise!"

Again, close by, the voice rang faintly, "Françoise! Françoise!"

She slowly turned, staring into the brilliant glare beyond.

"Who called?" he asked hoarsely.

"My mother," she said, listening intently. "Will you wait for me?"

His ashen face glowed again like a dull ember. She bent nearer, and caught his fingers in hers.

"By the memory of our last kiss, wait for me!" she pleaded, her little hand tightening on his.

"Where?" he said, with dry lips. "We cannot talk here!—we cannot say here the things that must be said."

"In your studio," she whispered. "Wait for me."

"Do you know the way?"

"I tell you I will come; truly I will! Only a moment with my mother—then I will be there!"

Their hands clung together an instant, then she slipped away into the crowded rooms; and after a moment Helmer followed, head bent, blinded by the glare.

"You are ill, Philip," said his host, as he took his leave. "Your face is as ghastly as that dying vaquero's—by Heaven, man, you *look* like him!"

"Did you find your girl in black?" asked his hostess curiously.

"Yes," he said; "good night."

The air was bitter as he stepped out—bitter as death. Scores of carriage lamps twinkled as he descended the snowy steps, and a faint gust of music swept out of the darkness, silenced as the heavy doors closed behind him.

He turned west, shivering. A long smear of light bounded his horizon as he pressed toward it and entered the sordid avenue beneath the iron arcade which was even now trembling under the shock of an oncoming train. It passed overhead with a roar; he raised his hot eyes and saw, through the tangled girders above, the illuminated disk of the clock tower—all distorted—for the fever in him was disturbing everything—even the cramped and twisted street into which he turned, fighting for breath like a man stabbed through and through.

"What folly!" he said aloud, stopping short in the darkness. "This is fever—all this. She could not know where to come—"

Where two blind alleys cut the shabby block, worming their way inward from the avenue and from Tenth Street, he stopped again, his hands working at his coat.

"It is fever, fever!" he muttered. "She was not there."

There was no light in the street save for the red fire lamp burning on the corner, and a glimmer from the Old Grapevine Tavern across the way. Yet all around him the darkness was illuminated with pale unsteady flames, lighting him as he groped through the shadows of the street to the blind alley. Dark old silent houses peered across the paved lane at their aged counterparts, waiting for him.

And at last he found a door that yielded, and he stumbled into the black passageway, always lighted on by the unsteady pallid flames which seemed to burn in infinite depths of night.

"She was not there—she was never there," he gasped, bolting the door and sinking down upon the floor. And, as his mind wandered, he raised his eyes and saw the great bare room growing whiter and whiter under the uneasy flames.

"It will burn as I burn," he said aloud—for the phantom flames had crept into his body. Suddenly he laughed, and the vast studio rang again.

"Hark!" he whispered, listening intently. "Who knocked?"

There was some one at the door; he managed to raise himself and drag back the bolt.

"You!" he breathed, as she entered hastily, her hair disordered and her black skirts powdered with snow.

"Who but I?" she whispered, breathless. "Listen! do you hear my mother calling me? It is too late; but she was with me to the end."

Through the silence, from an infinite distance, came a desolate cry of grief—"Françoise!"

He had fallen back into his chair again, and the little busy flames enveloped him so that the room began to whiten again into a restless glare. Through it he watched her.

The hour struck, passed, struck and passed again. Other hours grew, lengthening into night. She sat beside him with never a word or sigh or whisper of breathing; and dream after dream swept him, like burning winds. Then sleep immersed him so that he lay senseless, sightless eyes still fixed on her. Hour after hour—and the white glare died out, fading to a glimmer. In densest darkness, he stirred, awoke, his mind quite clear, and spoke her name in a low voice.

"Yes, I am here," she answered gently.

"Is it death?" he asked, closing his eyes.

"Yes. Look at me, Philip."

His eyes unclosed; into his altered face there crept an intense curiosity. For he beheld a glimmering shape, wide-winged and deep-eyed, kneeling beside him, and looking him through and through. ❋

The Bridal Pair

"If I were you," said the elder man, "I should take three months' solid rest."

"A month is enough," said the younger man. "Ozone will do it; the first brace of grouse I bag will do it—" He broke off abruptly, staring at the line of dimly lighted cars, where negro porters stood by the vestibuled sleepers, directing passengers to staterooms and berths.

"Dog all right, doctor?" inquired the elder man pleasantly.

"All right, doctor," replied the younger; "I spoke to the baggage master."

There was a silence; the elder man chewed an unlighted cigar reflectively, watching his companion with keen narrowing eyes.

The younger physician stood full in the white electric light, lean head lowered, apparently preoccupied with a study of his own shadow swimming and quivering on the asphalt at his feet.

"So you fear I may break down?" he observed, without raising his head.

"I think you're tired out," said the other.

"That's a more agreeable way of expressing it," said the young fellow. "I hear"—he hesitated, with a faint trace of irritation—"I understand that Forbes Stanly thinks me mentally unsound."

"He probably suspects what you're up to," said the elder man soberly.

"Well, what will he do when I announce my germ theory? Put me in a strait-jacket?"

"He'll say you're mad, until you prove it; every physician will agree with him—until your radium test shows us the microbe of insanity."

"Doctor," said the young man abruptly, "I'm going to admit something—to *you*."

"All right; go ahead and admit it."

"Well, I *am* a bit worried about my own condition."

"It's time you were," observed the other.

"Yes—it's about time. Doctor, I am seriously affected."

The elder man looked up sharply.

"Yes, I'm—in love."

"Ah!" muttered the elder physician, amused and a trifle disgusted; "so that's your malady, is it?"

"A malady—yes; not explainable by our germ theory—not affected by radio-activity. Doctor, I'm speaking lightly enough, but there's no happiness in it."

"Never is," commented the other, striking a match and lighting his ragged cigar. After a puff or two the cigar went out. "All I have to say," he added, "is, don't do it just now. Show me a scale of pure radium and I'll give you leave to marry every spinster in New York. In the mean time go and shoot a few dozen harmless, happy grouse; they can't shoot back. But let love alone. . . . By the way, who is she?"

"I don't know."

"You know her name, I suppose?"

The young fellow shook his head. "I don't even know where she lives," he said finally.

After a pause the elder man took him gently by the arm: "Are you subject to this sort of thing? Are you susceptible?"

"No, not at all."

"Ever before in love?"

"Yes—once."

"When?"

"When I was about ten years old. Her name was Rosamund—aged eight. I never had the courage to speak to her. She died recently, I believe."

The reply was so quietly serious, so destitute of any suspicion of humor, that the elder man's smile faded; and again he cast one of his swift, keen glances at his companion.

"Won't you stay away three months?" he asked patiently.

But the other only shook his head, tracing with the point of his walking stick the outline of his own shadow on the asphalt.

A moment later he glanced at his watch, closed it with a snap, silently shook hands with his equally silent friend, and stepped aboard the sleeping car.

Neither had noticed the name of the sleeping car.

It happened to be the *Rosamund*.

* * *

Loungers and passengers on Wildwood station drew back from the platform's edge as the towering locomotive shot by them, stunning their ears with the clangor of its melancholy bell.

Slower, slower glided the dusty train, then stopped, jolting; eddying circles of humanity closed around the cars, through which descending passengers pushed.

"Wildwood! Wildwood!" cried the trainmen; trunks tumbling out of the forward car descended with a bang!—a yelping, wagging setter dog landed on the platform, hysterically grateful to be free; and at the same moment a young fellow in tweed shooting clothes, carrying gripsack and gun case, made his way forward toward the baggage master, who was being jerked all over the platform by the frantic dog.

"Much obliged; I'll take the dog," he said, slipping a bit of silver into the official's hand, and receiving the dog's chain in return.

"Hope you'll have good sport," replied the baggage master. "There's a lot o' birds in this country, they tell me. You've got a good dog there."

The young man smiled and nodded, released the chain from his dog's collar, and started off up the dusty village street, followed by an urchin carrying his luggage.

The landlord of the Wildwood Inn stood on the veranda, prepared to receive guests. When a young man, a white setter dog, and a small boy loomed up, his speculative eyes became suffused with benevolence.

"How-de-so, sir?" he said cordially. "Guess you was with us three year since—stayed to supper. Ain't that so?"

"It certainly is," said his guest cheerfully. "I am surprised that you remember me."

"Be ye?" rejoined the landlord, gratified. "Say! I can tell the name of every man, woman, an' child that has ever set down to eat with us. You was here with a pair o' red bird dawgs; shot a mess o' birds before dark, come back pegged out, an' took the ten-thirty to Noo York. Hey? Yaas, an' you was cussin' round because you couldn't stay an' shoot for a month."

"I had to work hard in those days," laughed the young man. "You are right; it was three years ago this month."

"Time's a flyer; it's fitted with triple screws these days," said the landlord. "Come right in an' make yourself to home. Ed! O Ed! Take this bag to 13! We're all full, sir. You ain't scared at No. 13, be ye? Say! if I ain't a liar you had 13 three years ago! Waal, now!—ain't that the dumbdest—But you can have what you want Monday. How long was you calkerlatin' to stay?"

"A month—if the shooting is good."

"It's all right. Orrin Plummer come in last night with a mess o' pa'tridges. He says the woodcock is droppin' in to the birches south o' Sweetbrier Hill."

The young man nodded, and began to remove his gun from the service-worn case of sole leather.

"Ain't startin' right off, be ye?" inquired his host, laughing.

"I can't begin too quickly," said the young man, busy locking barrels to stock, while the dog looked on, thumping the veranda floor with his plumy tail.

The landlord admired the slim, polished weapon. "That's the instroo-ment!" he observed. "That there's a slick bird dawg, too. Guess I'd better fill my ice box. Your limit's thirty of each—cock an' pa'tridge. After that there's ducks."

"It's a good, sane law," said the young man, dropping his gun under one arm.

The landlord scratched his ear reflectively. "Lemme see," he mused; "wasn't you a doctor? I heard tell that you made up pieces for the papers about the idjits an' loonyticks of Rome an' Roosia an' furrin climes."

"I have written a little on European and Asiatic insanity," replied the doctor good-humoredly.

"Was you over to them parts?"

"For three years." He whistled the dog in from the road, where several yellow curs were walking round and round him, every hair on end.

The landlord said: "You look a little peakèd yourself. Take it easy the fust, is my advice."

His guest nodded abstractedly, lingering on the veranda, preoccupied with the beauty of the village street, which stretched away westward under tall elms. Autumn-tinted hills closed the vista; beyond them spread the blue sky.

"The cemetery lies that way, does it not?" inquired the young man.

"Straight ahead," said the landlord. "Take the road to the Holler."

"Do you"—the doctor hesitated—"do you recall a funeral there three years ago?"

"Whose?" asked his host bluntly.

"I don't know."

"I'll ask my woman; she saves them funeral pieces an' makes a album. . . . Friend o' yours buried there?"

"No."

The landlord sauntered toward the barroom, where two fellow taxpayers stood shuffling their feet impatiently.

"Waal, good luck, Doc," he said, without intentional offense; "supper's at six. We'll try an' make you comfortable."

"Thank you," replied the doctor, stepping out into the road, and motioning the white setter to heel.

"I remember now," he muttered, as he turned northward, where the road forked; "the cemetery lies to the westward; there should be a lane at the next turning—"

He hesitated and stopped, then resumed his course, mumbling to himself: "I can pass the cemetery later; she would not be there; I don't think I shall ever see her again. . . . I—I wonder whether I am—perfectly—well—"

The words were suddenly lost in a sharp indrawn breath; his heart ceased beating, fluttered, then throbbed on violently; and he shook from head to foot.

There was a glimmer of a summer gown under the trees; a figure passed from shadow to sunshine, and again into the cool dusk of a leafy lane.

The pallor of the young fellow's face changed; a heavy flush spread from forehead to neck; he strode forward, dazed, deafened by the tumult of his drumming pulses. The dog, alert, suspicious, led the way, wheeling into the bramble-bordered lane, only to halt, turn back, and fall in behind his master again.

In the lane ahead the light summer gown fluttered under the foliage, bright in the sunlight, almost lost in the shadows. Then he saw her on the hill's breezy crest, poised for a moment against the sky.

When at length he reached the hill, he found her seated in the shade of a pine. She looked up serenely, as though she had expected him, and they faced each other. A moment later his dog left him, sneaking away without a sound.

When he strove to speak, his voice had an unknown tone to him. Her upturned face was his only answer. The breeze in the pinetops, which had been stirring lazily and monotonously, ceased.

* * *

Her delicate face was like a blossom lifted in the still air; her upward glance chained him to silence. The first breeze broke the spell: he spoke a word, then speech died on his lips; he stood twisting his shooting cap, confused, not daring to continue.

The girl leaned back, supporting her weight on one arm, fingers almost buried in the deep green moss.

"It is three years to-day," he said, in the dull voice of one who dreams; "three years to-day. May I not speak?"

In her lowered head and eyes he read acquiescence; in her silence, consent.

"Three years ago to-day," he repeated; "the anniversary has given me courage to speak to you. Surely you will not take offense; we have traveled so far together!—from the end of the world to the end of it, and back again, here—to this place of all places in the world! And now to find you here on this day of all days—here within a step of our first meeting place—three years ago to-day! And all the world we have traveled over since, never speaking, yet ever passing on paths parallel—paths which for thousands of miles ran almost within arm's distance—"

She raised her head slowly, looking out from the shadows of the pines into the sunshine. Her dreamy eyes rested on acres of golden-rod and hillside brambles quivering in the September heat; on fern-choked gullies edged with alder; on brown and purple grasses; on pine thickets where slim silver birches glimmered.

"Will you speak to me?" he asked. "I have never even heard the sound of your voice."

She turned and looked at him, touching with idle fingers the soft hair curling on her temples. Then she bent her head once more, the faintest shadow of a smile in her eyes.

"Because," he said humbly, "these long years of silent recognition count for something! And then the strangeness of it!—the fate of it—the quiet destiny that ruled our lives—that rules them now—now as I am speaking, weighting every second with its tiny burden of fate."

She straightened up, lifting her half-buried hand from the moss; and he saw the imprint there where the palm and fingers had rested.

"Three years that end to-day—end with the new moon," he said. "Do you remember?"

"Yes," she said.

He quivered at the sound of her voice. "You were there, just beyond those oaks," he said eagerly; "we can see them from here. The road turns there—"

"Turns by the cemetery," she murmured.

"Yes, yes, by the cemetery! You had been there, I think."

"Do you remember that?" she asked.

"I have never forgotten—never!" he repeated, striving to hold her eyes to his own; "it was not twilight; there was a glimmer of day in the west, but the woods were darkening, and the new moon lay in the sky, and the evening was very clear and still."

Impulsively he dropped on one knee beside her to see her face; and as he spoke, curbing his emotion and impatience with that subtle deference which is inbred in men or never acquired, she stole a glance at him; and his worn visage brightened as though touched with sunlight.

"The second time I saw you was in New York," he said—"only a glimpse of your face in the crowd—but I knew you."

"I saw you," she mused.

"Did you?" he cried, enchanted. "I dared not believe that you recognized me."

"Yes, I knew you. . . . Tell me more."

The thrilling voice set him aflame; faint danger signals tinted her face and neck.

"In December," he went on unsteadily, "I saw you in Paris—I saw only you amid the thousand faces in the candlelight of Notre Dame."

"And I saw you. . . . And then?"

"And then two months of darkness. . . . And at last a light—moonlight—and you on the terrace at Amara."

"There was only a flower bed—a few spikes of white hyacinths between us," she said dreamily.

He strove to speak coolly. "Day and night have built many a wall between us; was that you who passed me in the starlight, so close that our shoulders touched, in that narrow street in Samarkand? And the dark figure with you—"

"Yes, it was I and my attendant."

"And . . . you, there in the fog—"

"At Archangel? Yes, it was I."

"On the Goryn?"

"It was I. . . . And I am here at last—with you. It is our destiny."

* * *

So, kneeling there beside her in the shadow of the pines, she absolved him in their dim confessional, holding him guiltless under the destiny that awaits us all.

Again that illumination touched his haggard face as though brightened by a sun ray stealing through the still foliage above. He grew younger under the level beauty of her gaze; care fell from him like a mask; the shadows that had haunted his eyes faded; youth awoke, transfiguring him and all his eyes beheld.

Made prisoner by love, adoring her, fearing her, he knelt beside her, knowing already that she had surrendered, though fearful yet by word or gesture or a glance to claim what destiny was holding for him—holding securely, inexorably, for him alone.

He spoke of her kindness in understanding him, and of his gratitude; of her generosity, of his wonder that she had ever noticed him on his way through the world.

"I cannot believe that we have never before spoken to each other," he said; "that I do not even know your name. Surely there was once a corner in the land of childhood where we sat together when the world was younger."

She said, dreamily: "Have you forgotten?"

"Forgotten?"

"That sunny corner in the land of childhood."

"Had you been there, I should not have forgotten," he replied, troubled.

"Look at me," she said. Her lovely eyes met his; under the penetrating sweetness of her gaze his heart quickened and grew restless and his uneasy soul stirred, awaking memories.

"There was a child," she said, "years ago; a child at school. You sometimes looked at her; you never spoke. Do you remember?"

He rose to his feet, staring down at her.

"Do you remember?" she asked again.

"Rosamund! Do you mean Rosamund? How should you know that?" he faltered.

The struggle for memory focused all his groping senses; his eyes seemed to look her through and through.

"How can you know?" he repeated unsteadily. "You are not Rosamund. . . . Are you? . . . She is dead. I heard that she was dead. . . . *Are you Rosamund?*"

"Do you not know?"

"Yes; you are not Rosamund. . . . What do you know of her?"

"I think she loved you."

"Is she dead?"

The girl looked up at him, smiling, following with delicate perception the sequence of his thoughts; and already his thoughts were far from the child Rosamund, a sweetheart of a day long since immortal; already he had forgotten his question, though the question was of life or death.

Sadness and unrest and the passing of souls concerned not him; she knew that all his thoughts were centered on her; that he was already living over once more the last three years, with all their mystery and charm, savoring their fragrance anew in the exquisite enchantment of her presence.

Through the autumn silence the pines began to sway in a wind unfelt below. She raised her eyes and saw their green crests shimmering and swimming in a cool current; a thrilling sound stole out, and with it floated the pine perfume, exhaling in the sunshine. He heard the dreamy harmony above, looked up; then, troubled, somber, moved by he knew not what, he knelt once more in the shadow beside her—close beside her.

She did not stir. Their destiny was close upon them. It came in the guise of love.

He bent nearer. "I love you," he said. "I loved you from the first. And shall forever. You knew it long ago."

She did not move.

"You knew I loved you?"

"Yes, I knew it."

The emotion in her voice, in every delicate contour of her face, pleaded for mercy. He gave her none, and she bent her head in silence, clasped hands tightening.

And when at last he had had his say, the burning words still rang in her ears through the silence. A curious faintness stole upon her, coming stealthily like a hateful thing. She strove to put it from her, to listen, to remember and understand the words he had spoken, but the dull confusion grew with the sound of the pines.

"Will you love me? Will you try to love me?"

"I love you," she said; "I have loved you so many, many years; I—I am Rosamund—"

She bowed her head and covered her face with both hands.

"Rosamund! Rosamund!" he breathed, enraptured.

She dropped her hands with a little cry; the frightened sweetness of her eyes held back his outstretched arms. "Do not touch me," she whispered; "you will not touch me, will you?—not yet—not now. Wait till I understand!" She pressed her hands to her eyes, then again let them fall, staring straight at him. "I loved you so!" she whispered. "Why did you wait?"

"Rosamund! Rosamund!" he cried sorrowfully, "what are you saying? I do not understand; I can understand nothing save that I worship you. May I not touch you?—touch your hand, Rosamund? I love you so."

"And I love you. I beg you not to touch me—not yet. There is something—some reason why—"

"Tell me, sweetheart."

"Do you not know?"

"By Heaven, I do not!" he said, troubled and amazed.

She cast one desperate, unhappy glance at him, then rose to her full height, gazing out over the hazy valleys to where the mountains began, piled up like dim sun-tipped clouds in the north.

The hill wind stirred her hair and fluttered the white ribbons at waist and shoulder. The golden-rod swayed in the sunshine. Below, amid yellow treetops, the roofs and chimneys of the village glimmered.

"Dear, do you not understand?" she said. "How can I make you understand that I love you—too late?"

"Give yourself to me, Rosamund; let me touch you—let me take you—"

"Will you love me always?"

"In life, in death, which cannot part us. Will you marry me, Rosamund?"

She looked straight into his eyes. "Dear, do you not understand? Have you forgotten? I died three years ago to-day."

The unearthly sweetness of her white face startled him. A terrible light broke in on him; his heart stood still.

In his dull brain words were sounding—his own words, written years ago: "When God takes the mind and leaves the body alive, there grows in it, sometimes, a beauty almost supernatural."

He had seen it in his practice. A thrill of fright penetrated him, piercing every vein with its chill. He strove to speak; his lips seemed frozen; he stood there before her, a ghastly smile stamped on his face, and in his heart, terror.

"What do you mean, Rosamund?" he said at last.

"That I am dead, dear. Did you not understand that? I—I thought you knew it—when you first saw me at the cemetery, after all those years since childhood. . . . Did you not know it?" she asked wistfully. "I must wait for my bridal."

Misery whitened his face as he raised his head and looked out across the sunlit world. Something had smeared and marred the fair earth; the sun grew gray as he stared.

Stupefied by the crash, the ruins of life around him, he stood mute, erect, facing the west.

She whispered, "Do you understand?"

"Yes," he said; "we will wed later. You have been ill, dear; but it is all right now—and will always be—God help us! Love is stronger than all—stronger than death."

"I know it is stronger than death," she said, looking out dreamily over the misty valley.

He followed her gaze, calmly, serenely reviewing all that he must renounce, the happiness of wedlock, children—all that a man desires.

Suddenly instinct stirred, awaking man's only friend—hope. A lifetime for the battle!—for a cure! Hopeless? He laughed in his excitement. Despair?—when the cure lay almost within his grasp!—the work he had given his life to! A month more in the laboratory—two months—three—perhaps a year. What of it? It must surely come—how could he fail when the work of his life meant all in life for her?

The light of exaltation slowly faded from his face; ominous, foreboding thoughts crept in; fear laid a shaky hand on his head which fell heavily forward on his breast.

Science and man's cunning and the wisdom of the world!

"O God," he groaned, "for Him who cured by laying on His hands!"

* * *

Now that he had learned her name, and that her father was alive, he stood mutely beside her, staring steadily at the chimneys and stately dormered roof almost hidden behind the crimson maple foliage across the valley—her home.

She had seated herself once more upon the moss, hands clasped upon one knee, looking out into the west with dreamy eyes.

"I shall not be long," he said gently. "Will you wait here for me? I will bring your father with me."

"I will wait for you. But you must come before the new moon. Will you? I must go when the new moon lies in the west."

"Go, dearest? Where?"

"I may not tell you," she sighed, "but you will know very soon—very soon now. And there will be no more sorrow, I think," she added timidly.

"There will be no more sorrow," he repeated quietly.

"For the former things are passing away," she said.

He broke a heavy spray of golden-rod and laid it across her knees; she held out a blossom to him—a blind gentain, blue as her eyes. He kissed it.

"Be with me when the new moon comes," she whispered. "It will be so sweet. I will teach you how divine is death, if you will come."

"You shall teach me the sweetness of life," he said tremulously.

"Yes—life. I did not know you called it by its truest name."

So he went away, trudging sturdily down the lane, gun glistening on his shoulder.

Where the lane joins the shadowy village street his dog skulked up to him, sniffing at his heels.

A mill whistle was sounding; through the red rays of the setting sun people were passing. Along the row of village shops loungers followed him with vacant eyes. He saw nothing, heard nothing, though a kindly voice called after him, and a young girl smiled at him on her short journey through the world.

The landlord of the Wildwood Inn sat sunning himself in the red evening glow.

"Well, doctor," he said, "you look tired to death. Eh? What's that you say?"

The young man repeated his question in a low voice. The landlord shook his head.

"No, sir. The big house on the hill is empty—been empty these three years. No, sir, there ain't no family there now. The old gentleman moved away three years ago."

"You are mistaken," said the doctor; "his daughter tells me he lives there."

"His—his daughter?" repeated the landlord. "Why, doctor, she's dead." He turned to his wife, who sat sewing by the open window: "Ain't it three years, Marthy?"

"Three years to-day," said the woman, biting off her thread. "She's buried in the family vault over the hill. She was a right pretty little thing, too."

"Turned nineteen," mused the landlord, folding his newspaper reflectively.

* * *

The great gray house on the hill was closed, windows and doors boarded over, lawn, shrubbery, and hedges tangled with weeds. A few scarlet poppies glimmered above the brown grass. Save for these, and clumps of tall wild phlox, there were no blossoms among the weeds.

His dog, which had sneaked after him, cowered as he turned northward across the fields. Swifter and swifter he strode; and as he stumbled on, the long sunset clouds faded, the golden light in the west died out, leaving a calm, clear sky tinged with the faintest green.

Pines hid the west as he crept toward the hill where she awaited him. As he climbed through dusky purple grasses, higher, higher, he saw the new moon's crescent tipping above the hills; and he crushed back the deathly fright that clutched at him and staggered on.

"Rosamund!"

The pines answered him.

"Rosamund!"

The pines replied, answering together. Then the wind died away, and there was no answer when he called.

East and south the darkening thickets, swaying, grew still. He saw the slim silver birches glimmering like the ghosts of young trees dead; he saw on the moss at his feet a broken stalk of golden-rod.

The new moon had drawn a veil across her face; sky and earth were very still.

While the moon lasted he lay, eyes open, listening, his face pillowed on the moss. It was long after sunrise when his dog came to him; later still when men came.

And at first they thought he was asleep. ❋

Out of the Depths

Dust and wind had subsided; there seemed to be a hint of rain in the starless west.

Because the August evening had become oppressive, the club windows stood wide open as though gaping for the outer air. Rugs and curtains had been removed; an incandescent light or two accentuated the emptiness of the rooms; here and there shadowy servants prowled, gilt buttons sparkling through the obscurity, their footsteps on the bare floor intensifying the heavy quiet.

Into this week's-end void wandered young Shannon, drifting aimlessly from library to corridor, finally entering the long room where the portraits of dead governors smirked through the windows at the deserted avenue.

As his steps echoed on the rugless floor, a shadowy something detached itself from the depths of a padded armchair by the corner window, and a voice he recognized greeted him by name.

"You here, Harrod!" he exclaimed. "Thought you were at Bar Harbor."

"I was. I had business in town."

"Do you stay here long?"

"Not long," said Harrod slowly.

Shannon dropped into a chair with a yawn which ended in a groan.

"Of all God-forsaken places," he began, "a New York club in August."

Harrod touched an electric button, but no servant answered the call; and presently Shannon, sprawling in his chair, jabbed the button with the ferrule of his walking stick, and a servant took the order, repeating as though he had not understood: "Did you say two, sir?"

"With olives, dry," nodded Shannon irritably. They sat there in silence until the tinkle of ice aroused them, and—

"Double luck to you,"muttered Shannon; then, with a scarcely audible sigh: "Bring two more and bring a dinner card." And, turning to the older man: "You're dining, Harrod?"

"If you like."

A servant came and turned on an electric jet; Shannon scanned the card under the pale radiance, scribbled on the pad, and handed it to the servant.

"Did you put down my name?" asked Harrod curiously.

"No; you'll dine with me—if you don't mind."

"I don't mind—for this last time."

"Going away again?"

"Yes."

Shannon signed the blank and glanced up at his friend. "Are you well?" he asked abruptly.

Harrod, lying deep in his leather chair, nodded.

"Oh, you're rather white around the gills! We'll have another."

"I thought you had cut that out, Shannon."

"Cut what out?"

"Drinking."

"Well, I haven't," said Shannon sulkily, lifting his glass and throwing one knee over the other.

"The last time I saw you, you said you would cut it," observed Harrod.

"Well, what of it?"

"But you haven't?"

"No, my friend."

"Can't you stop?"

"I could—now. To-morrow—I don't know; but I know well enough I couldn't day after to-morrow. And day after to-morrow I shall not care."

A short silence and Harrod said: "That's why I came back here."

"What?"

"To stop you."

Shannon regarded him in sullen amazement.

A servant announcing dinner brought them to their feet; together they walked out into the empty dining room and seated themselves by an open window.

Presently Shannon looked up with an impatient laugh.

"For Heaven's sake let's be cheerful, Harrod. If you knew how the damned town had got on my nerves."

"*That's* what I came back for, too," said Harrod with his strange white smile. "I knew the world was fighting you to the ropes."

"It is; here I stay on, day after day, on the faint chance of something doing." He shrugged his shoulders. "Business is worse than dead; I can't hold on much longer. You're right; the world has hammered me to the ropes, and it will be down and out for me unless—"

"Unless you can borrow on your own terms?"

"Yes, but I can't."

"You are mistaken."

"Mistaken? Who will—"

"I will."

"You! Why, man, do you know how much I need? Do you know for how long I shall need it? Do you know what the chances are of my making good? *You!* Why, Harrod, I'd swamp you! You can't afford—"

"I can afford anything—now."

Shannon stared. "You have struck something?"

"Something that puts me beyond want." He fumbled in his breast pocket, drew out a portfolio, and from the flat leather case he produced a numbered check bearing his signature, but not filled out.

"Tell them to bring pen and ink," he said.

Shannon, perplexed, signed to a waiter. When the ink was brought, Harrod motioned Shannon to take the pen. "Before I went to Bar Harbor," he said, "I had a certain sum—" He hesitated, mentioned this sum in a low voice, and asked Shannon to fill in the check for that amount. "Now blot it, pocket it, and use it," he added listlessly, looking out into the lamp-lighted street.

Shannon, whiter than his friend, stared at the bit of perforated yellow paper.

"I can't take it," he stammered; "my security is rotten, I tell you—"

"I want no security; I—I am beyond want," said Harrod. "Take it; I came back here for this—partly for this."

"Came back here to—to—help *me!*"

"To help you. Shannon, I had been a lonely man in life; I think you never realized how much your friendship has been to me. I had nobody—no intimacies. You never understood—you with all your friends—that I cared more for our casual companionship than for anything in the world."

Shannon bent his head. "I did not know it," he said.

Harrod raised his eyes and looked up at the starless sky; Shannon ate in silence; into his young face, already marred by dissipation, a strange light had come. And little by little order began to emerge from his whirling senses; he saw across an abyss a bridge glittering, and beyond that, beckoning to him through a white glory, all that his heart desired.

"I was at the ropes," he muttered; "how *could* you know it, Harrod? I—I never whined—"

"I know more than I did—yesterday," said Harrod, resting his pale face on one thin hand.

Shannon, nerves on edge, all aquiver, the blood racing through every vein, began to speak excitedly: "It's like a dream—one of the blessed sort—Harrod! Harrod!—the dreams I've had this last year! And I try—I try to understand what has happened—what you have done for me. I can't—I'm shaking all over, and I suppose I'm sitting here eating and drinking, but—"

He touched his glass blindly; it tipped and crashed to the floor, the breaking froth of the wine hissing on the cloth.

"Harrod! Harrod! What sort of a man am I to deserve this of you? What can I do—"

"Keep your nerve—for one thing."

"I will!—you mean *that!*" touching the stem of the new glass, which the waiter had brought and was filling. He struck the glass till it rang out a clear, thrilling, crystalline note, then struck it more sharply. It splintered with a soft splashing crash. "Is *that* all?" he laughed.

"No, not all."

"What more will you let me do?"

"One thing more. Tell them to serve coffee below."

So they passed out of the dining room, through the deserted corridors, and descended the stairway to the lounging room. It was unlighted and empty; Shannon stepped back and the elder man passed him and took the corner chair by the window—the same seat where Shannon had first seen him sitting ten years before, and where he always looked to find him after the ending of a business day. And continuing his thoughts, the younger man spoke aloud impulsively: "I remember perfectly well how we met. Do you? You had just come back to town from Bar Harbor, and I saw you stroll in and seat yourself in that corner, and, because I was sitting next you, you asked if you might include me in your order—do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

"And I told you I was a new member here, and you pointed out the portraits of all those dead governors of the club, and told me what good fellows they had been. I found out later that you yourself were a governor of the club."

"Yes—I was."

Harrod's shadowy face swerved toward the window, his eyes resting on the familiar avenue, empty now save for the policeman opposite, and the ragged children of the poor. In August the high tide from the slums washes Fifth Avenue, stranding a gasping flotsam at the thresholds of the absent.

"And I remember, too, what you told me," continued Shannon.

"What?" said Harrod, turning noiselessly to confront his friend.

"About that child. Do you remember? That beautiful child you saw? Don't you remember that you told me how she used to leave her governess and talk to you on the rocks—"

"Yes," said Harrod. "*That,* too, is why I came back here to tell you the rest. For the evil days have come to her, Shannon, and the years draw nigh. Listen to me."

There was a silence; Shannon, mute and perplexed, set his coffee on the window sill and leaned back, flicking the ashes from his cigar; Harrod passed his hands slowly over his hollow temples: "Her parents are dead; she is not yet twenty; she is not equipped to support herself in life; and—she is beautiful. What chance has she, Shannon?"

The other was silent.

"What chance?" repeated Harrod. "And, when I tell you that she is unsuspicious, and that she reasons only with her heart, answer me—what chance has she with a man? For you know men, and so do I, Shannon, so do I."

"Who is she, Harrod?"

"The victim of divorced parents—awarded to her mother. Let her parents answer; they are answering now, Shannon. But their plea is no concern of yours. What concerns you is the living. The child, grown to womanhood, is here, advertising for employment—here in New York, asking for a chance. What chance has she?"

"When did you learn this?" asked Shannon soberly.

"I learned it to-night—everything concerning her—to-night—an hour before I—I met you. *That* is why I returned. Shannon, listen to me attentively; listen to every word I say. Do you remember a passing fancy you had this spring for a blue-eyed girl you met every morning on your way downtown? Do you remember that, as the days went on, little by little she came to return your glance?—then your smile?—then, at last, your greeting? And do you remember, once, that you told me about it in a moment of depression—told me that you were close to infatuation, that you believed her to be everything sweet and innocent, that you dared not drift any farther, knowing the chances and knowing the end—bitter unhappiness either way, whether in guilt or innocence—"

"I remember," said Shannon hoarsely. "But that is not—cannot be—"

"That is the girl."

"Not the child you told me of—"

"Yes."

"How—when did you know—"

"To-night. I know more than that, Shannon. You will learn it later. Now ask me again, what it is that you may do."

"I ask it," said Shannon under his breath. "What am I to do?"

For a long while Harrod sat silent, staring out of the dark window; then, "It is time for us to go."

"You wish to go out?"

"Yes; we will walk together for a little while—as we did in the old days, Shannon—only a little while, for I must be going back."

"Where are you going, Harrod?"

But the elder man had already risen and moved toward the door; and Shannon picked up his hat and followed him out across the dusky lamplighted street.

Into the avenue they passed under the white, unsteady radiance of arc lights which drooped like huge lilies from stalks of bronze; here and there the front of some hotel lifted like a cliff, its window-pierced façade pulsating with yellow light, or a white marble mass, cold and burned out, spread a sea of shadow over the glimmering asphalt. At times the lighted lamps of cabs flashed in their faces; at times figures passed like spectres; but into the street where they were now turning were neither lamps nor people nor sound, nor any light, save, far in the obscure vista, a dull hint of lightning edging the west.

Twice Shannon had stopped, peering at Harrod, who neither halted nor slackened his steady, noiseless pace; and the younger man, hesitating, moved on again, quickening his steps to his friend's side.

"Where are—are you going?"

"Do you not know?"

The color died out of Shannon's face; he spoke again, forming his words slowly with dry lips:

"Harrod, why—why do you come into this street—to-night? What do you know? *How* do you know? I tell you I—I cannot endure this—this tension—"

"*She* is enduring it."

"Good God!"

"Yes, God is good," said Harrod, turning his haggard face as they halted. "Answer me, Shannon, where are we going?"

"To—her. You know it! Harrod! Harrod! How did you know? I—I did not know myself until an hour before I met you; I had not see her in weeks—I had not dared to—for all trust in self was dead. To-day, down-town, I faced the crash and saw across to-morrow the end of all. Then, in my journey hellward to-night, just at dusk, we passed each other, and before I understood what I had done we were side by side. And almost instantly—I don't know how—she seemed to sense the ruin before us both—for mine was heavy on my soul, Harrod, as I stood, measuring damnation with smiling eyes—at the brink of it, there. And she knew I was adrift at last."

He looked up at the house before him. "I said I would come. She neither assented nor denied me, nor asked a question. But in her eyes, Harrod, I saw what one sees in the eyes of children, and it stunned me. . . . What shall I do?"

"Go to her and look again," said Harrod. "*That* is what I have come to ask of you. Good-by."

He turned, his shadowy face drooping, and Shannon followed to the avenue. There, in the white outbreak of electric lamps, he saw Harrod again as he had always known him, a hint of a smile in his worn eyes, the well-shaped mouth edged with laughter, and he was saying: "It's all in a lifetime, Shannon—and more than you suspect—much more. You have not told me her name yet?"

"I do not know it."

"Ah, she will tell you if you ask! Say to her that I remember her there on the sea rocks. Say to her that I have searched for her always, but that it was only to-night I knew what to-morrow she shall know—and you, Shannon, you, too, shall know. Good-by."

"Harrod! wait. Don't—don't go—"

He turned and looked back at the younger man with that familiar gesture he knew so well.

It was final, and Shannon swung blindly on his heel and entered the street again, eyes raised to the high lighted window under which he had halted a moment before. Then he mounted the steps, groped in the vestibule for the illuminated number, and touched the electric knob. The door swung open noiselessly as he entered, closing behind him with a soft click.

Up he sped, mounting stair on stair, threading the narrow hallways, then upward again, until of a sudden she stood confronting him, bent forward, white hands tightening on the banisters.

Neither spoke. She straightened slowly, fingers relaxing from the polished rail. Over her shoulders he saw a lamplighted room, and she turned and looked backward at the threshold and covered her face with both hands.

"What is it?" he whispered, bending close to her. "Why do you tremble? You need not. There is nothing in all the world you need fear. Look into my eyes. Even a child may read them now."

Her hands fell from her face and their eyes met, and what she read in his, and he in hers, God knows, for she swayed where she stood, lids closing; yielding hands and lips and throat and hair. She cried, too, later, her hands on his shoulders where he knelt beside her, holding him at arm's length from her fresh young face to search his for the menace she once had read there. But it was gone—that menace she had read and vaguely understood, and she cried a little more, one arm around his head pressed close to her side.

"From the very first—the first moment I saw you," he said under his breath, answering the question aquiver on her lips—lips divinely merciful, repeating the lovers' creed and the confession of faith for which, perhaps, all souls in love are shriven in the end.

"Naida! Naida!"—for he had learned her name and could not have enough of it—"all that the world holds for me of good is here, circled by my arms. Not mine the manhood to win out, alone—but there is a man who came to me to-night and stood sponsor for the falling soul within me.

"How he knew my peril and yours, God knows. But he came like Fate and held his buckler before me, and he led me here and set a flaming sword before your door—the door of the child he loved—there on the sea rocks ten years ago. Do you remember? He said you would. And he is no archangel—this man among men, this friend with whom, unknowing, I have this night wrestled face to face. His name is Harrod."

"*My* name!" She stood up straight and pale, within the circle of his arms; he rose, too, speechless, uncertain—then faced her, white and appalled.

She said: "He—he followed us to Bar Harbor. I was a child, I remember. I hid from my governess and talked with him on the rocks. Then we went away. I—I lost my father." Staring at her, his stiffening lips formed a word, but no sound came.

"Bring him to me!" she whispered. "How can he know I am here and stay away! Does he think I have forgotten? Does he think shame of me? Bring him to me!"

She caught his hands in hers and kissed them passionately; she framed his face in her small hands of a child and looked deep, deep into his eyes: "Oh, the happiness you have brought! I love you! You with whom I am to enter Paradise! Now bring him to me!"

Shaking, amazed, stunned in a whirl of happiness and doubt, he crept down the black stairway, feeling his way. The doors swung noiselessly; he was almost running when he turned into the avenue. The trail of white lights starred his path; the solitary street echoed his haste; and now he sprang into the wide doorway of the club, and as he passed, the desk clerk leaned forward, handing him a telegram. He took it, halted, breathing heavily, and asked for his friend.

"Mr. Harrod?" repeated the clerk. "Mr. Harrod has not been here in a month, sir."

"What? I dined with Mr. Harrod here at eight o'clock!" he laughed.

"Sir? I—I beg your pardon, sir, but you dined here alone to-night—"

"Send for the steward!" broke in Shannon impatiently, slapping his open palm with the yellow envelope. The steward came, followed by the butler, and to a quick question from the desk clerk, replied: "Mr. Harrod has not been in the club for six weeks."

"But I dined with Mr. Harrod at eight! Wilkins, did you not serve us?"

"I served you, sir; you dined alone—" The butler hesitated, coughed discreetly; and the steward added: "You ordered for two, sir—"

Something in the steward's troubled face silenced Shannon; the butler ventured: "Beg pardon, sir, but we—the waiters thought you might be—ill, seeing how you talked to yourself and called for ink to write upon the cloth and broke two glasses, laughing like—"

Shannon staggered, turning a ghastly visage from one to another. Then his dazed gaze centered upon the telegram crushed in his hand, and shaking from head to foot, he smoothed it out and opened the envelope.

But it was purely a matter of business; he was requested to come to Bar Harbor and identify a useless check, drawn to his order, and perhaps aid to identify the body of a drowned man in the morgue. ✵

Police!!!

TO

LOUISE JOCELYN

All the pretty things you say,
   All the pretty things you do
In your own delightful way
   Make me fall in love with you,
Turning Autumn into May.

Every day is twice as gay
   Just because of you, Louise!
Which is going some, you say?
In my dull, pedantic way
I am fashioning my lay
   Just because I want to please.

Just because the things you say,
   Just because the things you do
In your clever, charming way
   Make me fall in love with you.
That is all, my dear, to-day.
R. W. C.
Christmas, 1915.

Foreword

Give me no gold nor palaces
Nor quarts of gems in chalices
Nor mention me in Who is Who
I'd rather roam abroad with you
Investigating sky and land,
Volcanoes, lakes, and glacial sand
I'd rather climb with all my legs
To find a nest of speckled eggs,
Or watch the spotted spider spin
Or see a serpent shed its skin!
Give me no star-and-garter blue!
I'd rather roam around with you.

Flatten me not with flattery!
Walk with me to the Battery,
And see in glassy tanks the seals,
The sturgeons, founders, smelt and eels
Disport themselves in ichthyic curves—
And when it gets upon our nerves
Then, while our wabbling taxi honks
I'll tell you all about the Bronx,
Where captive wild things mope and stare
Through grills of steel that bar each lair
Doomed to imprisonment for life—
And you may go and take your wife.

Come to the Park[1] with me;
I'll show you crass stupidity
Which sentences the hawk and fox
To inactivity, and locks
The door of freedom on the lynx
Where puma pines and eagle stinks.
Never a slaver's fetid hold
Has held the misery untold.
That crowds the great cats' kennels where
Their vacant eyes glare blank despair
Half crazed by sloth, half dazed by fear
All day, all night, year after year.

To the swift, clean things that cleave the air
   To the swift, clean things that cleave the sea
To the swift, clean things that brave and dare
   Forest and peak and prairie free,
A cage to craze and stifle and stun
And a fat man feeding a penny bun
And a she-one giggling, "Ain't it grand!"
As she drags a dirty-nosed brat by the hand.

---

[1] Central Park, filthiest, cruellest and most outrageous of zoölogical exhibitions.

Police!!!

Being a few deathless truths concerning several mysteries recently and scientifically unravelled by a modest servant of Science.

Quo quisque stultior, eo magis insolescit.

Police!!!

(complete)

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Book Publication 1915

Preface

On a beautiful day in spring as I was running as hard as I could run pursued by the New York police and a number of excited citizens, my mind, which becomes brilliantly active under physical exhilaration, began to work busily.

I thought about all sorts of things: I thought about hard times and financial depression and about our great President who is in a class all alone with himself and soon to become extinct; I thought about art and why there isn't any when it's talked about; I thought of macro-lepidoptera, of metagrammatism, monoliths, manicures, and monsoons.

And all the time I was running as fast as I could run; and the faster I ran the more things I thought about until my terrific pace set my brain whizzing like a wheel.

I felt no remorse at having published these memoirs of my life—which was why the police and populace were pursuing me, maddened to frenzy by the fearless revelation of mighty scientific truths in this little volume you are about to attempt to read. *Ubicumque ars ostentatur, veritas abesse videtur!*

I thought about it clearly, calmly, concisely as I fled. The maddened shouts of the prejudiced populace did not disturb me. Around and around the Metropolitan Museum of Art I ran; the inmates of that institution came out to watch me and they knew at a glance that I was one of them for they set up a clamor like a bunch of decoy ducks when one of their wild comrades comes whirling by.

"Police! Police!" they shouted; but I went careering on uptown, afraid only that the park squirrels might club together to corner me. There are corners in grain. Why not in—but let that pass.

I took the park wall in front of the great Mr. Carnegie's cottage at a single bound. He stood on his terrace and shouted, "Police!" He was quite logical.

The Equal Franchise Society was having a May party in the park near the Harlem Mere. They had chosen the Honorable William Jennings Bryan as Queen of the May. He wore low congress-gaiters and white socks; he was walking under a canopy, crowned with paper flowers, his hair curled over his coat collar, the tips of his fingers were suavely joined over his abdomen.

The moment he caught sight of me he shouted, "Police!"

He was right. The cabinet lacked only me.

And I might have consented to tarry—might have allowed myself to be apprehended for political purposes, had not a nobler, holier, more imperative duty urged me northward still.

Though all Bloomingdale shouted, "Stop him!" and all Matteawan yelled, "Police!" I should not have consented to pause. Even the quackitudinous recognition spontaneously offered by the Metropolitan Museum had not been sufficient to decoy me to my fellows.

I knew, of course, that I could find a sanctuary and a welcome in many places—in almost any sectarian edifice, any club, any newspaper office, any of the great publishers', any school, any museum; I knew that I would be welcomed at Columbia University, at the annex to the Hall of Fame, in the Bishop's Palace on Morningside Heights—there were many places all ready to receive, understand and honour me.

For a sufficiently crippled intellect, for a still-born brain, for the intellectually aborted, there is always a place on some editorial, sectarian, or educational staff.

Try It!

But I had other ideas as I galloped northward. The voiceless summons of the most jealous of mistresses was making siren music in my ears. That coquettish jade, Science, was calling me by wireless, and I was responding with both legs.

And so, at last, I arrived at the Bronx Park and dashed into the Administration Building where everybody rose and cheered me to the echo.

I was at home at last, unterrified, undismayed, and ready again as always to dedicate my life to the service of Truth and to every caprice and whim of my immortal mistress, Science. But I don't want to marry her.

Magna est veritas! Sed major et longinquo reverentia. ✻

The Third Eye

Although the man's back was turned toward me, I was uncomfortably conscious that he was watching me. How he could possibly be watching me while I stood directly behind him, I did not ask myself; yet, nevertheless, instinct warned me that I was being inspected; that somehow or other the man was staring at me as steadily as though he and I had been face to face and his faded, sea-green eyes were focussed upon me.

It was an odd sensation which persisted in spite of logic, and of which I could not rid myself. Yet the little waitress did not seem to share it. Perhaps she was not under his glassy inspection. But then, of course, I could not be either.

No doubt the nervous tension incident to the expedition was making me supersensitive and even morbid.

Our sail-boat rode the shallow turquoise-tinted waters at anchor, rocking gently just off the snowy coral reef on which we were now camping. The youthful waitress who, for economy's sake, wore her cap, apron, collar and cuffs over her dainty print dress, was seated by the signal fire writing in her diary. Sometimes she thoughtfully touched her pencil point with the tip of her tongue; sometimes she replenished the fire from a pile of dead mangrove branches heaped up on the coral reef beside her. Whatever she did she accomplished gracefully.

As for the man, Grue, his back remained turned toward us both and he continued, apparently, to scan the horizon for the sail which we all expected. And all the time I could not rid myself of the unpleasant idea that somehow or other he was looking at me, watching attentively the expression of my features and noting my every movement.

The smoke of our fire blew wide across leagues of shallow, sparkling water, or, when the wind veered, whirled back into our faces across the reef, curling and eddying among the standing mangroves like fog drifting.

Seated there near the fire, from time to time I swept the horizon with my marine glasses; but there was no sign of Kemper; no sail broke the far sweep of sky and water; nothing moved out there save when a wild duck took wing amid the dark raft of its companions to circle low above the ocean and settle at random, invisible again except when, at intervals, its white breast flashed in the sunshine.

Meanwhile the waitress had ceased to write in her diary and now sat with the closed book on her knees and her pencil resting against her lips, gazing thoughtfully at the back of Grue's head.

It was a ratty head of straight black hair, and looked greasy. The rest of him struck me as equally unkempt and dingy—a youngish man, lean, deeply bitten by the sun of the semi-tropics to a mahogany hue, and unusually hairy.

I don't mind a brawny, hairy man, but the hair on Grue's arms and chest was a rusty red, and like a chimpanzee's in texture, and sometimes a wildly absurd idea possessed me that the man needed it when he went about in the palm forests without his clothes.

But he was only a "poor white"—a "cracker" recruited from one of the reefs near Pelican Light, where he lived alone by fishing and selling his fish to the hotels at Heliatrope City. The sail-boat was his; he figured as our official guide on this expedition—an expedition which already had begun to worry me a great deal.

For it was, perhaps, the wildest goose chase and the most absurdly hopeless enterprise ever undertaken in the interest of science by the Bronx Park authorities.

Nothing is more dreaded by scientists than ridicule; and it was in spite of this terror of ridicule that I summoned sufficient courage to organize an exploring party and start out in search of something so extraordinary, so hitherto unheard of, that I had not dared reveal to Kemper by letter the object of my quest.

No, I did not care to commit myself to writing just yet; I had merely sent Kemper a letter to join me on Sting-ray Key.

He telegraphed me from Tampa that he would join me at the rendezvous; and I started directly from Bronx Park for Heliatrope City; arrived there in three days; found the waitress all ready to start with me; inquired about a guide and discovered the man Grue in his hut off Pelican Light; made my bargain with him; and set sail for Sting-ray Key, the most excited and the most nervous young man who ever had dared disaster in the sacred cause of science.

Everything was now at stake, my honour, reputation, career, fortune. For, as chief of the Anthropological Field Survey Department of the great Bronx Park Zoölogical Society, I was perfectly aware that no scientific reputation can survive ridicule.

Nevertheless, the die had been cast, the Rubicon crossed in a sail-boat containing one beachcombing cracker, one hotel waitress, a pile of camping kit and special utensils, and myself!

How was I going to tell Kemper? How was I going to confess to him that I was staking my reputation as an anthropologist upon a letter or two and a personal interview with a young girl—a waitress at the Hotel Gardenia in Heliatrope City?

* * *

I lowered my sea-glasses and glanced sideways at the waitress. She was still chewing the end of her pencil, reflectively.

She was a pretty girl, one Evelyn Grey, and had been a country school-teacher in Massachusetts until her health broke.

Florida was what she required; but that healing climate was possible to her only if she could find there a self-supporting position.

Also she had nourished an ambition for a post-graduate education, with further aspirations to a Government appointment in the Smithsonian Institute.

All very worthy, no doubt—in fact, particularly commendable because the wages she saved as waitress in a Florida hotel during the winter were her only means of support while studying for college examinations during the summer in Boston, where she lived.

Yet, although she was an inmate of Massachusetts, her face and figure would have ornamented any light-opera stage. I never looked at her but I thought so; and her cuffs and apron merely accentuated the delusion. Such ankles are seldom seen when the curtain rises after the overture. Odd that frivolous thoughts could flit through an intellect dedicated only to science!

The man, Grue, had not stirred from his survey of the Atlantic Ocean. He had a somewhat disturbing capacity for remaining motionless—like a stealthy and predatory bird which depends on immobility for aggressive and defensive existence.

The sea-wind fluttered his cotton shirt and trousers and the tattered brim of his straw hat. And always I felt as though he were watching me out of the back of his ratty head, through the ravelled straw brim that sagged over his neck.

The pretty waitress had now chewed the end of her pencil to a satisfactory pulp, and she was writing again in her diary, very intently, so that my cautious touch on her arm seemed to startle her.

Meeting her inquiring eyes I said in a low voice:

"I am not sure why, but I don't seem to care very much for that man, Grue. Do you?"

She glanced at the water's edge, where Grue stood, immovable, his back still turned to us.

"I never liked him," she said under her breath.

"Why?" I asked cautiously.

She merely shrugged her shoulders. She did it gracefully.

I said:

"Have you any particular reason for disliking him?"

"He's dirty."

"He *looks* dirty, yet every day he goes into the sea and swims about. He ought to be clean enough."

She thought for a moment, then:

"He seems, somehow, to be fundamentally unclean—I don't mean that he doesn't wash himself. But there are certain sorts of animals and birds and other creatures from which one instinctively shrinks—not, perhaps, because they are materially unclean—"

"I understand," I said. After a silence I added: "Well, there's no chance now of sending him back, even if I were inclined to do so. He appears to be familiar with these latitudes. I don't suppose we could find a better man for our purpose. Do you?"

"No. He was a sponge fisher once, I believe."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No. But yesterday, when you took the boat and cruised to the south, I sat writing here and keeping up the fire. And I saw Grue climbing about among the mangroves over the water in a most uncanny way; and two snake-birds sat watching him, and they never moved.

"He didn't seem to see them; his back was toward them. And then, all at once, he leaped backward at them where they sat on a mangrove, and he got one of them by the neck—"

"What!"

The girl nodded.

"By the neck," she repeated, "and down they went into the water. And what do you suppose happened?"

"I can't imagine," said I with a grimace.

"Well, Grue went under, still clutching the squirming, flapping bird; and he *stayed* under."

"Stayed under the *water?*"

"Yes, longer than any sponge diver I ever heard of. And I was becoming frightened when the bloody bubbles and feathers began to come up—"

"*What* was he doing under water?"

"He must have been tearing the bird to pieces. Oh, it was quite unpleasant, I assure you, Mr. Smith. And when he came up and looked at me out of those very vitreous eyes he resembled something horridly amphibious. . . . And I felt rather sick and dizzy."

"He's got to stop that sort of thing!" I said angrily. "Snake-birds are harmless and I won't have him killing them in that barbarous fashion. I've warned him already to let birds alone. I don't know how he catches them or why he kills them. But he seems to have a mania for doing it—"

I was interrupted by Grue's soft and rather pleasant voice from the water's edge, announcing a sail on the horizon. He did not turn when speaking.

The next moment I made out the sail and focussed my glasses on it.

"It's Professor Kemper," I announced presently.

"I'm so glad," remarked Evelyn Grey.

I don't know why it should have suddenly occurred to me, apropos of nothing, that Billy Kemper was unusually handsome. Or why I should have turned and looked at the pretty waitress—except that she was, perhaps, worth gazing upon from a purely non-scientific point of view. In fact, to a man not entirely absorbed in scientific research and not passionately and irrevocably wedded to his profession, her violet-blue eyes and rather sweet mouth might have proved disturbing.

As I was thinking about this she looked up at me and smiled.

"It's a good thing," I thought to myself, "that I am irrevocably wedded to my profession." And I gazed fixedly across the Atlantic Ocean.

* * *

There was scarcely sufficient breeze of a steady character to bring Kemper to Sting-ray Key; but he got out his sweeps when I hailed him and came in at a lively clip, anchoring alongside of our boat and leaping ashore with that unnecessary dash and abandon which women find pleasing.

Glancing sideways at my waitress through my spectacles, I found her looking into a small hand mirror and patting her hair with one slim and suntanned hand.

When Professor Kemper landed on the coral he shot a curious look at Grue, and then came striding across the reef to me.

"Hello, Smithy!" he said, holding out his hand. "Here I am, you see! Now what's up—"

Just then Evelyn Grey got up from her seat beside the fire; and Kemper turned and gazed at her with every symptom of unfeigned approbation.

I introduced him. Evelyn Grey seemed a trifle indifferent. A good-looking man doesn't last long with a clever woman. I smiled to myself, polishing my spectacles gleefully. Yet, I had no idea why I was smiling.

We three people turned and walked toward the comb of the reef. A solitary palm represented the island's vegetation, except, of course, for the water-growing mangroves.

I asked Miss Grey to precede us and wait for us under the palm; and she went forward in that light-footed way of hers which, to any non-scientific man, might have been a trifle disturbing. It had no effect upon me. Besides, I was looking at Grue, who had gone to the fire and was evidently preparing to fry our evening meal of fish and rice. I didn't like to have him cook, but I wasn't going to do it myself; and my pretty waitress didn't know how to cook anything more complicated than beans. We had no beans.

Kemper said to me:

"Why on earth did you bring a waitress?"

"Not to wait on table," I replied, amused. "I'll explain her later. Meanwhile, I merely want to say that you need not remain with this expedition if you don't want to. It's optional with you."

"That's a funny thing to say!"

"No, not funny; sad. The truth is that if I fail I'll be driven into obscurity by the ridicule of my brother scientists the world over. I had to tell them at the Bronx what I was going after. Every man connected with the society attempted to dissuade me, saying that the whole thing was absurd and that my reputation would suffer if I engaged in such a ridiculous quest. So when you hear what that girl and I are after out here in the semi-tropics, and when you are in possession of the only evidence I have to justify my credulity, if you want to go home, go. Because I don't wish to risk *your* reputation as a scientist unless you choose to risk it yourself."

He regarded me curiously, then his eyes strayed toward the palm-tree which Evelyn Grey was now approaching.

"All right," he said briefly, "let's hear what's up."

So we moved forward to rejoin the girl, who had already seated herself under the tree.

She looked very attractive in her neat cuffs, tiny cap, and pink print gown, as we approached her.

"Why does she dress that way?" asked Kemper, uneasily.

"Economy. She desires to use up the habiliments of a service which there will be no necessity for her to reënter if this expedition proves successful."

"Oh. But Smithy—"

"What?"

"Was it—moral—to bring a waitress?"

"Perfectly," I replied sharply. "Science knows no sex!"

"I don't understand how a waitress can be scientific," he muttered, "and there seems to be no question about her possessing plenty of sex—"

"If that girl's conclusions are warranted," I interrupted coldly, "she is a most intelligent and clever person. *I* think they are warranted. If you don't, you may go home as soon as you like."

I glanced at him; he was smiling at her with that strained politeness which alters the natural expression of men in the imminence of a conversation with a new and pretty woman.

I often wonder what particular combination of facial muscles are brought into play when that politely receptive expression transforms the normal and masculine features into a fixed simper.

When Kemper and I had seated ourselves, I calmly cut short the small talk in which he was already indulging, and to which, I am sorry to say, my pretty waitress was beginning to respond. I had scarcely thought it of her—but that's neither here nor there—and I invited her to recapitulate the circumstances which had resulted in our present foregathering here on this strip of coral in the Atlantic Ocean.

She did so very modestly and without embarrassment, stating the case and reviewing the evidence so clearly and so simply that I could see how every word she uttered was not only amazing but also convincing Kemper.

When she had ended he asked a few questions very seriously:

"Granted," he said, "that the pituitary gland represents what we assume it represents, how much faith is to be placed in the testimony of a Seminole Indian?"

"A Seminole Indian," she replied, "has seldom or never been known to lie. And where a whole tribe testify alike the truth of what they assert can not be questioned."

"How did you make them talk? They are a sullen, suspicious people, haughty, uncommunicative, seldom even replying to an ordinary question from a white man."

"They consider me one of them."

"Why?" he asked in surprise.

"I'll tell you why. It came about through a mere accident. I was waitress at the hotel; it happened to be my afternoon off; so I went down to the coquina dock to study. I study in my leisure moments, because I wish to fit myself for a college examination."

Her charming face became serious; she picked up the hem of her apron and continued to pleat it slowly and with precision as she talked:

"There was a Seminole named Tiger-tail sitting there, his feet dangling above his moored canoe, evidently waiting for the tide to turn before he went out to spear crayfish. I merely noticed he was sitting there in the sunshine, that's all. And then I opened my mythology book and turned to the story of Argus, on which I was reading up.

"And this is what happened: there was a picture of the death of Argus, facing the printed page which I was reading—the well-known picture where Juno is holding the head of the decapitated monster—and I had read scarcely a dozen words in the book before the Seminole beside me leaned over and placed his forefinger squarely upon the head of Argus.

"'Who?' he demanded.

"I looked around good-humoredly and was surprised at the evident excitement of the Indian. They're not excitable, you know.

"'That,' said I, 'is a Greek gentleman named Argus.' I suppose he thought I meant a Minorcan, for he nodded. Then, without further comment, he placed his finger on Juno.

"'*Who?*' he inquired emphatically.

"I said flippantly: 'Oh, that's only my aunt, Juno.'

"'Aunty of you?'

"'Yes.'

"'She kill 'um Three-eye?'

"Argus had been depicted with three eyes.

"'Yes,' I said, 'my Aunt Juno had Argus killed.'

"'Why kill 'um?'

"'Well, Aunty needed his eyes to set in the tails of the peacocks which drew her automobile. So when they cut off the head of Argus my aunt had the eyes taken out; and that's a picture of how she set them into the peacock.'

"'Aunty of *you?'* he repeated.

"'Certainly,' I said gravely; 'I am a direct descendant of the Goddess of Wisdom. That's why I'm always studying when you see me down on the dock here.'

"'You Seminole!' he said emphatically.

"'Seminole,' I repeated, puzzled.

"'You Seminole! Aunty Seminole—*you* Seminole!'

"'Why, Tiger-tail?'

"'Seminole hunt Three-eye long time—hundred, hundred year—hunt 'um Three-eye, kill 'um Three-eye.'

"'You say that for hundreds of years the Seminoles have hunted a creature with three eyes?'

"'Sure! Hunt 'um now!'

"'*Now?'*

"'Sure!'

"'But, Tiger-tail, if the legends of your people tell you that the Seminoles hunted a creature with three eyes hundreds of years ago, certainly no such three-eyed creatures remain today?'

"'Some.'

"'What! Where?'

"'Black Bayou.'

"'Do you mean to tell me that a living creature with three eyes still inhabits the forests of Black Bayou?'

"'Sure. Me see 'um. Me kill 'um three-eye man.'

"'You have killed a man who had *three eyes?'*

"'Sure!'

"'A man? *With three eyes?'*

"'Sure.'"

* * *

The pretty waitress, excitedly engrossed in her story, was unconsciously acting out the thrilling scene of her dialogue with the Indian, even imitating his voice and gestures. And Kemper and I listened and watched her breathlessly, fascinated by her lithe and supple grace as well as by the astounding story she was so frankly unfolding with the consummate artlessness of a natural actress.

She turned her flushed face to us:

"I made up my mind," she said, "that Tiger-tail's story was worth investigating. It was perfectly easy for me to secure corroboration, because that Seminole went back to his Everglade camp and told every one of his people that I was a white Seminole because my ancestors also hunted the three-eyed man and nobody except a Seminole could know that such a thing as a three-eyed man existed.

"So, the next afternoon off, I embarked in Tiger-tail's canoe and he took me to his camp. And there I talked to his people, men and women, questioning, listening, putting this and that together, trying to discover some foundation for their persistent statements concerning men, still living in the jungles of Black Bayou, who had three eyes instead of two.

"All told the same story; all asserted that since the time their records ran the Seminoles had hunted and slain every three-eyed man they could catch; and that as long as the Seminoles had lived in the Everglades the three-eyed men had lived in the forests beyond Black Bayou."

She paused, dramatically, cooling her cheeks in her palms and looking from Kemper to me with eyes made starry by excitement.

"And *what* do you think!" she continued, under her breath. "To prove what they said they brought for my inspection a skull. And then two more skulls like the first one.

"Every skull had been painted with Spanish red; the coarse black hair still stuck to the scalps. And, behind, just over where the pituitary gland is situated, was a hollow, bony orbit—unmistakably the socket of a *third eye!"*

"W-where are those skulls?" demanded Kemper, in a voice not entirely under control.

"They wouldn't part with one of them. I tried every possible persuasion. On my own responsibility, and even before I communicated with Mr. Smith—" turning toward me, "I offered them twenty thousand dollars for a single skull, staking my word of honour that the Bronx Museum would pay that sum.

"It was useless. Not only do the Seminoles refuse to part with one of those skulls, but I have also learned that I am the first person with a white skin who has ever even heard of their existence—so profoundly have these red men of the Everglades guarded their secret through centuries."

After a silence Kemper, rather pale, remarked:

"This is a most astonishing business, Miss Grey."

"What do you think about it?" I demanded. "Is it not worth while for us to explore Black Bayou?"

He nodded in a dazed sort of way, but his gaze remained riveted on the girl. Presently he said:

"Why does Miss Grey go?"

She turned in surprise:

"Why am I going? But it is *my* discovery—*my* contribution to science, isn't it?"

"Certainly!" we exclaimed warmly and in unison. And Kemper added: "I was only thinking of the dangers and hardships. Smith and I could do the actual work—"

"Oh!" she cried in quick protest, "I wouldn't miss one moment of the excitement, one pain, one pang! I *love* it! It would simply break my heart not to share every chance, hazard, danger of this expedition—every atom of hope, excitement, despair, uncertainty—and the ultimate success—the unsurpassable thrill of exultation in the final instant of triumph!"

She sprang to her feet in a flash of uncontrollable enthusiasm, and stood there, aglow with courage and resolution, making a highly agreeable picture in her apron and cuffs, the sea wind fluttering the bright tendrils of her hair under her dainty cap.

We got to our feet much impressed; and now absolutely convinced that there did exist, somewhere, descendants of prehistoric men in whom the third eye—placed in the back of the head for purposes of defensive observation—had not become obsolete and reduced to the traces which we know only as the pituitary body or pituitary gland.

Kemper and I were, of course, aware that in the insect world the ocelli served the same purpose that the degenerate pituitary body once served in the occiput of man.

As we three walked slowly back to the campfire, where our evening meal was now ready, Evelyn Grey, who walked between us, told us what she knew about the hunting of these three-eyed men by the Seminoles—how intense was the hatred of the Indians for these people, how murderously they behaved toward any one of them whom they could track down and catch.

"Tiger-tail told me," she went on, "that in all probability the strange race was nearing extinction, but that all had not yet been exterminated because now and then, when hunting along Black Bayou, traces of living three-eyed men were still found by him and his people.

"No later than last week Tiger-tail himself had startled one of these strange denizens of Black Bayou from a meal of fish; and had heard him leap through the bushes and plunge into the water. It appears that centuries of persecution have made these three-eyed men partly amphibious—that is, capable of filling their lungs with air and remaining under water almost as long as a turtle."

"That's impossible!" said Kemper bluntly.

"I thought so myself," she said with a smile, "until Tiger-tail told me a little more about them. He says that they can breathe through the pores of their skins; that their bodies are covered with a thick, silky hair, and that when they dive they carry down with them enough air to form a sort of skin over them, so that under water their bodies appear to be silver-plated."

"Good Lord!" faltered Kemper. "That is a little too much!"

"Yet," said I, "that is exactly what air-breathing water beetles do. The globules of air, clinging to the body-hairs, appear to silver-plate them; and they can remain below indefinitely, breathing through spiracles. Doubtless the skin pores of these men have taken on the character of spiracles."

"You know," he said in a curious, flat voice, which sounded like the tones of a partly stupefied man, "this whole business is so grotesque—apparently so wildly absurd—that it's having a sort of nightmare effect on me." And, dropping his voice to a whisper close to my ear: "Good heavens!" he said. "Can you reconcile such a creature as we are starting out to hunt, with anything living known to science?"

"No," I replied in guarded tones. "And there are moments, Kemper, since I have come into possession of Miss Grey's story, when I find myself seriously doubting my own sanity."

"I'm doubting mine, now," he whispered, "only that girl is so fresh and wholesome and human and sane—"

"She is a very clever girl," I said.

"And really beautiful!"

"She is intelligent," I remarked. There was a chill in my tone which doubtless discouraged Kemper, for he ventured nothing further concerning her superficially personal attractions.

After all, if any questions of priority were to arise, the pretty waitress was *my* discovery. And in the scientific world it is an inflexible rule that he who first discovers any particular specimen of any species whatever is first entitled to describe and comment upon that specimen without interference or unsolicited advice from anybody.

Maybe there was in my eye something that expressed as much. For when Kemper caught my cold gaze fixed upon him he winced and looked away like a reproved setter dog who knew better. Which also, for the moment, put an end to the rather gay and frivolous line of small talk which he had again begun with the pretty waitress.

I was exceedingly surprised at Professor William Henry Kemper, D.F.

As we approached the campfire the loathsome odour of frying mullet saluted my nostrils.

Kemper, glancing at Grue, said aside to me:

"That's an odd-looking fellow. What is he? Minorcan?"

"Oh, just a beachcomber. I don't know what he is. He strikes me as dirty—though he can't be so, physically. I don't like him and I don't know why. And I wish we'd engaged somebody else to guide us."

* * *

Toward dawn something awoke me and I sat up in my blanket under the moon. But my leg had not been pulled.

Kemper snored at my side. In her little dog-tent the pretty waitress probably was fast asleep. I knew it because the string she had tied to one of her ornamental ankles still lay across the ground convenient to my hand. In any emergency I had only to pull it to awake her.

A similar string, tied to my ankle, ran parallel to hers and disappeared under the flap of her tent. This was for her to pull if she liked. She had never yet pulled it. Nor I the other. Nevertheless I truly felt that these humble strings were, in a subtler sense, ties that bound us together. No wonder Kemper's behaviour had slightly irritated me.

I looked up at the silver moon; I glanced at Kemper's unlovely bulk, swathed in a blanket; I contemplated the dog-tent with, perhaps, that slight trace of sentiment which a semi-tropical moon is likely to inspire even in a jellyfish. And suddenly I remembered Grue and looked for him.

He was accustomed to sleep in his boat, but I did not see him in either of the boats. Here and there were a few lumpy shadows in the moonlight, but none of them was Grue lying prone on the ground. Where the devil had he gone?

Cautiously I untied my ankle string, rose in my pajamas, stepped into my slippers, and walked out through the moonlight.

There was nothing to hide Grue, no rocks or vegetation except the solitary palm on the backbone of the reef.

I walked as far as the tree and looked up into the arching fronds. Nobody was up there. I could see the moonlit sky through the fronds. Nor was Grue lying asleep anywhere on the other side of the coral ridge.

And suddenly I became aware of all my latent distrust and dislike for the man. And the vigour of my sentiments surprised me because I really had not understood how deep and thorough my dislike had been.

Also, his utter disappearance struck me as uncanny. Both boats were there; and there were many leagues of sea to the nearest coast.

Troubled and puzzled I turned and walked back to the dead embers of the fire. Kemper had merely changed the timbre of his snore to a whistling aria, which at any other time would have enraged me. Now, somehow, it almost comforted me.

Seated on the shore I looked out to sea, racking my brains for an explanation of Grue's disappearance. And while I sat there racking them, far out on the water a little flock of ducks suddenly scattered and rose with frightened quackings and furiously beating wings.

For a moment I thought I saw a round, dark object on the waves where the flock had been.

And while I sat there watching, up out of the sea along the reef to my right crawled a naked, dripping figure holding a dead duck in his mouth.

Fascinated, I watched it, recognising Grue with his ratty black hair all plastered over his face.

Whether he caught sight of me or not, I don't know; but he suddenly dropped the dead duck from his mouth, turned, and dived under water.

It was a grim and horrid species of sport or pastime, this amphibious business of his, catching wild birds and dragging them about as though he were an animal.

Evidently he was ashamed of himself, for he had dropped the duck. I watched it floating by on the waves, its head under water. Suddenly something jerked it under, a fish perhaps, for it did not come up and float again, as far as I could see.

When I went back to camp Grue lay apparently asleep on the north side of the fire. I glanced at him in disgust and crawled into my tent.

The next day Evelyn Grey awoke with a headache and kept her tent. I had all I could do to prevent Kemper from prescribing for her. I did that myself, sitting beside her and testing her pulse for hours at a time, while Kemper took one of Grue's grains and went off into the mangroves and speared grunt and eels for a chowder which he said he knew how to concoct.

Toward afternoon the pretty waitress felt much better, and I warned Kemper and Grue that we should sail for Black Bayou after dinner.

* * *

Dinner was a mess, as usual, consisting of fried mullet and rice, and a sort of chowder in which the only ingredients I recognised were sections of crayfish.

After we had finished and had withdrawn from the fire, Grue scraped every remaining shred of food into a kettle and went for it. To see him feed made me sick, so I rejoined Miss Grey and Kemper, who had found a green cocoanut and were alternately deriving nourishment from the milk inside it.

Somehow or other there seemed to me a certain levity about that performance, and it made me uncomfortable; but I managed to smile a rather sickly smile when they offered me a draught, and I took a pull at the milk—I don't exactly know why, because I don't like it. But the moon was up over the sea, now, and the dusk was languorously balmy, and I didn't care to leave those two drinking milk out of the same cocoanut under a tropic moon.

Not that my interest in Evelyn Grey was other than scientific. But after all it was I who had discovered her.

We sailed as soon as Grue, gobbling and snuffling, had cleaned up the last crumb of food. Kemper blandly offered to take Miss Grey into his boat, saying that he feared my boat was overcrowded, what with the paraphernalia, the folding cages, Grue, Miss Grey, and myself.

I sat on that suggestion, but offered to take my own tiller and lend him Grue. He couldn't wriggle out of it, seeing that his alleged motive had been the overcrowding of my boat, but he looked rather sick when Grue went aboard his boat.

As for me, I hoisted sail with something so near to a chuckle that it surprised me; and I looked at Evelyn Grey to see whether she had noticed the unseemly symptom.

Apparently she had not. She sat forward, her eyes fixed soulfully upon the moon. Had I been dedicated to any profession except a scientific one—but let that pass.

Grue in Kemper's sail-boat led, and my boat followed out into the silvery and purple dusk, now all sparkling under the high lustre of the moon.

Dimly I saw vast rafts of wild duck part and swim leisurely away to port and starboard, leaving a glittering lane of water for us to sail through; into the scintillant night from the sea sprang mullet, silvery, quivering, falling back into the wash with a splash.

Here and there in the moonlight steered ominous black triangles, circling us, leading us, sheering across bow and flashing wake, all phosphorescent with lambent sea-fire—the fins of great sharks.

"You need have no fear," said I to the pretty waitress.

She said nothing.

"Of course if you *are* afraid," I added, "perhaps you might care to change your seat."

There was room in the stern where I sat.

"Do you think there is any danger?" she asked.

"From sharks?"

"Yes."

"Reaching up and biting you?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I don't really suppose there is," I said, managing to convey the idea, I am ashamed to say, that the catastrophe was a possibility.

She came over and seated herself beside me. I was very much ashamed of myself, but I could not repress a triumphant glance ahead at the other boat, where Kemper sat huddled forward, evidently bored to extinction.

Every now and then I could see him turn and crane his neck as though in an effort to distinguish what was going on in our boat.

There was nothing going on, absolutely nothing. The moon was magnificent; and I think the pretty waitress must have been a little tired, for her head drooped and nodded at moments, even while I was talking to her about a specimen of *Euplectilla speciosa* on which I had written a monograph. So she must have been really tired, for the subject was interesting.

"You won't incommode my operations with sheet and tiller," I said to her kindly, "if you care to rest your head against my shoulder."

Evidently she was very tired, for she did so, and closed her eyes.

After a while, fearing that she might fall over backward into the sea—but let that pass. . . . I don't know whether or not Kemper could distinguish anything aboard our boat. He craned his head enough to twist it off his neck.

To be so utterly, so blindly devoted to science is a great safeguard for a man. Single-mindedness, however, need not induce atrophy of every humane impulse. I drew the pretty waitress closer—not that the night was cold, but it might become so. Changes in the tropics come swiftly. It is well to be prepared.

Her cheek felt very soft against my shoulder. There seemed to be a faint perfume about her hair. It really was odd how subtly fragrant she seemed to be—almost, perhaps, a matter of scientific interest.

Her hands did not seem to be chilled; they did seem unusually smooth and soft.

I said to her: "When at home, I suppose your mother tucks you in; doesn't she?"

"Yes," she nodded sleepily.

"And what does she do then?" said I , with something of that ponderous playfulness with which I make scientific jokes at a meeting of the Bronx Anthropological Association, when I preside.

"She kisses me and turns out the light," said Evelyn Grey, innocently.

I don't know how much Kemper could distinguish. He kept dodging about and twisting his head until I really thought it would come off, unless it had been screwed on like the top of a piano stool.

A few minutes later he fired his pistol twice; and Evelyn sat up. I never knew why he fired; he never offered any explanation.

Toward midnight I could hear the roar of breakers on our starboard bow. Evelyn heard them, too, and sat up inquiringly.

"Grue has found the inlet to Black Bayou, I suppose," said I.

And it proved to be the case, for, with the surf thundering on either hand, we sailed into a smoothly flowing inlet through which the flood tide was running between high dunes all sparkling in the moonlight and crowned with shadowy palms.

Occasionally I heard noises ahead of us from the other boat, as though Kemper was trying to converse with us, but as his apropos was as unintelligible as it was inopportune, I pretended not to hear him. Besides, I had all I could do to manoeuvre the tiller and prevent Evelyn Grey from falling off backward into the bayou. Besides, it is not customary to converse with the man at the helm.

After a while—during which I seemed to distinguish in Kemper's voice a quality that rhymes with his name—his tones varied through phases all the way from irony to exasperation. After a while he gave it up and took to singing.

There was a moon, and I suppose he thought he had a voice. It didn't strike me so. After several somewhat melancholy songs, he let off his pistol two or three times and then subsided into silence.

I didn't care; neither his songs nor his shots interrupted—but let that pass, also.

We were now sailing into the forest through pool after pool of interminable lagoons, startling into unseen and clattering flight hundreds of waterfowl. I could feel the wind from their whistling wings in the darkness, as they drove by us out to sea. It seemed to startle the pretty waitress. It is a solemn thing to be responsible for a pretty girl's peace of mind. I reassured her continually, perhaps a trifle nervously. But there were no more pistol shots. Perhaps Kemper had used up his cartridges.

We were still drifting along under drooping sails, borne inland almost entirely by the tide, when the first pale, watery, gray light streaked the east. When it grew a little lighter, Evelyn sat up; all danger of sharks being over. Also, I could begin to see what was going on in the other boat. Which was nothing remarkable; Kemper slumped against the mast, his head turned in our direction; Grue sat at the helm, motionless, his tattered straw hat sagging on his neck.

When the sun rose, I called out cheerily to Kemper, asking him how he had passed the night. Evelyn also raised her head, pausing while bringing her disordered hair under discipline, to listen to his reply.

But he merely mumbled something. Perhaps he was still sleepy.

As for me, I felt exceedingly well; and when Grue turned his craft in shore, I did so, too; and when, under the overhanging foliage of the forest, the nose of my boat grated on the sand, I rose and crossed the deck with a step distinctly frolicsome.

Kemper seemed distant and glum; Evelyn Grey spoke to him shyly now and then, and I noticed she looked at him only when he was gazing elsewhere than at her. She had a funny, conciliatory air with him, half ashamed, partly humorous and amused, as though something about Kemper's sulky ill-humor was continually making tiny inroads on her gravity.

Some mullet had jumped into the two boats—half a dozen during our moonlight voyage—and these were now being fried with rice for us by Grue. Lord! How I hated to eat them!

After we had finished breakfast, Grue, as usual, did everything to the remainder except to get into the fry-pan with both feet; and as usual he sickened me.

When he'd cleaned up everything, I sent him off into the forest to find a dry shell-mound for camping purposes; then I made fast both boats, and Kemper and I carried ashore our paraphernalia, spare *batterie-de-cuisine*, firearms, fishing tackle, spears, harpoons, grains, oars, sails, spars, folding cage—everything with which a strictly scientific expedition is usually burdened.

Evelyn was washing her face in the crystal waters of a branch that flowed into the lagoon from under the live-oaks. She looked very pretty doing it, like a naiad or dryad scrubbing away at her forest toilet.

It was, in fact, such a pretty spectacle that I was going over to sit beside her while she did it, but Kemper started just when I was going to, and I turned away. Some men invariably do the wrong thing. But a handsome man doesn't last long with a pretty girl.

I was thinking of this as I stood contemplating an alligator slide, when Grue came back saying that the shore on which we had landed was the termination of a shell-mound, and that it was the only dry place he had found.

So I bade him pitch our tents a few feet back from the shore; and stood watching him while he did so, one eye reverting occasionally to Evelyn Grey and Kemper. They both were seated cross-legged beside the branch, and they seemed to be talking a great deal and rather earnestly. I couldn't quite understand what they found to talk about so earnestly and volubly all of a sudden, inasmuch as they had heretofore exchanged very few observations during a most brief and formal acquaintance, dating only from sundown the day before.

Grue set up our three tents, carried the luggage inland, and then hung about for a while until the vast shadow of a vulture swept across the trees.

I never saw such an indescribable expression on a human face as I saw on Grue's as he looked up at the huge, unclean bird. His vitreous eyes fairly glittered; the corners of his mouth quivered and grew wet; and to my astonishment he seemed to emit a low, mewing noise.

"What the devil are you doing?" I said impulsively, in my amazement and disgust.

He looked at me, his eyes still glittering, the corners of his mouth still wet; but the curious sounds had ceased.

"What?" he asked.

"Nothing. I thought you spoke." I didn't know what else to say.

He made no reply. Once, when I had partly turned my head, I was aware that he was warily turning his to look at the vulture, which had alighted heavily on the ground near the entrails and heads of the mullet, where he had cast them on the dead leaves.

I walked over to where Evelyn Grey and Kemper sat so busily conversing; and their volubility ceased as they glanced up and saw me approaching. Which phenomenon both perplexed and displeased me.

I said:

"This is the Black Bayou forest, and we have the most serious business of our lives before us. Suppose you and I start out, Kemper, and see if there are any traces of what we are after in the neighborhood of our camp."

"Do you think it safe to leave Miss Grey alone in camp?" he asked gravely.

I hadn't thought of that:

"No, of course not," I said. "Grue can stay."

"I don't need anybody," she said quickly. "Anyway, I'm rather afraid of Grue."

"Afraid of Grue?" I repeated.

"Not exactly afraid. But he's—unpleasant."

"I'll remain with Miss Grey," said Kemper politely.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I couldn't ask that. It is true that I feel a little tired and nervous, but I can go with you and Mr. Smith and Grue—"

I surveyed Kemper in cold perplexity. As chief of the expedition, I couldn't very well offer to remain with Evelyn Grey, but I didn't propose that Kemper should, either.

"Take Grue," he suggested, "and look about the woods for a while. Perhaps after dinner Miss Grey may feel sufficiently rested to join us."

"I am sure," she said, "that a few hours' rest in camp will set me on my feet. All I need is rest. I didn't sleep very soundly last night."

I felt myself growing red, and I looked away from them both.

"Oh," said Kemper, in apparent surprise, "I thought you had slept soundly all night long."

"Nobody," said I, "could have slept very pleasantly during that musical performance of yours."

"Were you singing?" she asked innocently of Kemper.

"He was singing when he wasn't firing off his pistol," I remarked. "No wonder you couldn't sleep with any satisfaction to yourself."

Grue had disappeared into the forest; I stood watching for him to come out again. After a few minutes I heard a furious but distant noise of flapping; the others also heard it; and we listened in silence, wondering what it was.

"It's Grue killing something," faltered Evelyn Grey, turning a trifle pale.

"Confound it!" I exclaimed. "I'm going to stop that right now."

Kemper rose and followed me as I started for the woods; but as we passed the beached boats Grue appeared from among the trees.

"Where have you been?" I demanded.

"In the woods."

"Doing what?"

"Nothing."

There was a bit of down here and there clinging to his cotton shirt and trousers, and one had caught and stuck at the corner of his mouth.

"See here, Grue," I said, "I don't want you to kill any birds except for camp purposes. Why do you try to catch and kill birds?"

"I don't."

I stared at the man and he stared back at me out of his glassy eyes.

"You mean to say that you don't, somehow or other, manage to catch and kill birds?"

"No, I don't."

There was nothing further for me to say unless I gave him the lie. I didn't care to do that, needing his services.

Evelyn Grey had come up to join us; there was a brief silence; we all stood looking at Grue; and he looked back at us out of his pale, washed-out, and unblinking eyes.

"Grue," I said, "I haven't yet explained to you the object of this expedition to Black Bayou. Now, I'll tell you what I want. But first let me ask you a question or two. You know the Black Bayou forests, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever see anything unusual in these forests?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

The man stared at us, one after another. Then he said:

"What are you looking for in Black Bayou?"

"Something very curious, very strange, very unusual. So strange and unusual, in fact, that the great Zoölogical Society of the Bronx in New York has sent me down here at the head of this expedition to search the forests of Black Bayou."

"For what?" he demanded, in a dull, accentless voice.

"For a totally new species of human being, Grue. I wish to catch one and take it back to New York in that folding cage."

His green eyes had grown narrow as though sun-dazzled. Kemper had stepped behind us into the woods and was now busy setting up the folding cage. Grue remained motionless.

"I am going to offer you," I said, "the sum of one thousand dollars in gold if you can guide us to a spot where we may see this hitherto unknown species—a creature which is apparently a man but which has, in the back of his head, *a third eye*—"

I paused in amazement: Grue's cheeks had suddenly puffed out and were quivering; and from the corners of his slitted mouth he was emitting a whimpering sound like the noise made by a low-circling pigeon.

"Grue!" I cried. "What's the matter with you?"

"What is *he* doing?" screamed Grue, quivering from head to foot, but not turning around.

"Who?" I cried.

"The man behind me!"

"Professor Kemper? He's setting up the folding cage—"

With a screech that raised my hair, Grue whipped out his murderous knife and *hurled himself backward* at Kemper, but the latter shrank aside behind the partly erected cage, and Grue whirled around, snarling, hacking, and even biting at the wood frame and steel bars.

And then occurred a thing so horrid that it sickened me to the pit of my stomach; for the man's sagging straw hat had fallen off, and there, in the back of his head, through the coarse, black, ratty hair, I saw a glassy eye glaring at me.

"Kemper!" I shouted. "He's got a third eye! He's one of them! Knock him flat with your rifle-stock!" And I seized a shot-gun from the top of the baggage bundle on the ground beside me, and leaped at Grue, aiming a terrific blow at him.

But the glassy eye in the back of his head was watching me between the clotted strands of hair, and he dodged both Kemper and me, swinging his heavy knife in circles and glaring at us both out of the front and back of his head.

Kemper seized him by his arm, but Grue's shirt came off, and I saw his entire body was as furry as an ape's. And all the while he was snapping at us and leaping hither and thither to avoid our blows; and from the corners of his puffed cheeks he whined and whimpered and mewed through the saliva foam.

"Keep him from the water!" I panted, following him with the clubbed shot-gun; and as I advanced I almost stepped on a soiled heap of foulness—the dead buzzard which he had caught and worried to death with his teeth.

Suddenly he threw his knife at my head, hurling it backward; dodged, screeched, and bounded by me toward the shore of the lagoon, where the pretty waitress was standing, petrified.

For one moment I thought he had her, but she picked up her skirts, ran for the nearest boat, and seized a harpoon; and in his fierce eagerness to catch her he leaped clear over the boat and fell with a splash into the lagoon.

As Kemper and I sprang aboard and looked over into the water, we could see him going down out of reach of a harpoon; and his body seemed to be silver-plated, flashing and glittering like a burnished eel, so completely did the skin of air envelop him, held there by the fur that covered him.

And, as he rested for a moment on the bottom, deep down through the clear waters of the lagoon where he lay prone, I could see, as the current stirred his long, black hair, the third eye looking up at us, glassy, unwinking, horrible.

* * *

A bubble or two, like globules of quicksilver, were detached from the burnished skin of air that clothed him, and came glittering upward.

Suddenly there was a flash; a flurrying cloud of blue mud; and Grue was gone.

* * *

After a long while I turned around in the muteness of my despair. And slowly froze.

For the pretty waitress, becomingly pale, was gathered in Kemper's arms, her cheek against his shoulder. Neither seemed to be aware of me.

"Darling," he said, in the imbecile voice of a man in love, "why do you tremble so when I am here to protect you? Don't you love and trust me?"

"Oo—h—yes," she sighed, pressing her cheek closer to his shoulder.

I shoved my hands into my pockets, passed them without noticing them, and stepped ashore.

And there I sat down under a tree, with my back toward them, all alone and face to face with the greatest grief of my life.

But which it was—the loss of her or the loss of Grue, I had not yet made up my mind. ❋

The Immortal

I

As everybody knows, the great majority of Americans, upon reaching the age of natural selection, are elected to the American Institute of Arts and Ethics, which is, so to speak, the Ellis Island of the Academy.

Occasionally a general mobilization of the Academy is ordered and, from the teeming population of the Institute, a new Immortal is selected for the American Academy of Moral Endeavor by the simple process of blindfolded selection from *Who's Which*.

The motto of this most stately of earthly institutions is a peculiarly modest, truthful, and unintentional epigram by Tupper:

> "Unknown, I became Famous; Famous, I remain Unknown."

And so I found it to be the case; for, when at last I was privileged to write my name, "Smith, Academician," I discovered to my surprise that I knew none of my brother Immortals, and, more amazing still, none of them had ever heard of me.

This latter fact became the more astonishing to me as I learned the identity of the other Immortals.

Even the President of our great republic was numbered among these Olympians. I had every right to suppose that he had heard of me. I had happened to hear of him, because his Secretary of State once mentioned him at Chautauqua.

It was a wonderfully meaningless sensation to know nobody and to discover myself equally unknown amid that matchless companionship. We were like a mixed bunch of gods, Greek, Norse, Hindu, Hottentot—all gathered on Olympus, having never heard of each other but taking it for granted that we were all gods together and all members of this club.

My initiation into the Academy had been fixed for April first, and I was much worried concerning the address which I was of course expected to deliver on that occasion before my fellow members.

It had to be an exciting address because slumber was not an infrequent phenomenon among the Immortals on such solemn occasions. Like dozens of dozing Joves a dull discourse always set them nodding.

But always under such circumstances the pretty ushers from Barnard College passed around refreshments; a suffragette orchestra struck up; the ushers uprooted the seated Immortals and foxtrotted them into comparative consciousness.

But I didn't wish to have my inaugural address interrupted, therefore I was at my wits' ends to discover a subject of such exciting scientific interest that my august audience could not choose but listen as attentively as they would listen from the front row to some deathless stunt in vaudeville.

That morning I had left the Bronx rather early, hoping that a long walk might compose my thoughts and enable me to think of some sufficiently entertaining and unusual subject for my inaugural address.

I walked as far as Columbia University, gazed with rapture upon its magnificent architecture until I was as satiated as though I had arisen from a banquet at Childs'.

To aid mental digestion I strolled over to the noble home of the Academy and Institute adjoining Mr. Huntington's Hispano-Moresque Museum.

It was a fine, sunny morning, and the Immortals were being exercised by a number of pretty ushers from Barnard.

I gazed upon the impressive procession with pride unutterable; very soon I also should walk two and two in the sunshine, my dome crowned with figurative laurels, cracking scientific witticisms with my fellow inmates, or, perhaps, squeezing the pretty fingers of some— But let that pass.

I was, as I say, gazing upon this inspiring scene on a beautiful morning in February, when I became aware of a short and visibly vulgar person beside me, plucking persistently at my elbow.

"Are you the great Academician, Perfessor Smith?" he asked, tipping his pearl-coloured and somewhat soiled bowler.

"Yes," I said condescendingly. "Your description of me precludes further doubt. What can I do for you, my good man?"

"Are you this here Perfessor Smith of the Department of Anthropology in the Bronx Park Zoölogical Society?" he persisted.

"What do you desire of me?" I repeated, taking another look at him. He was exceedingly ordinary.

"Prof, old sport," he said cordially, "I took a slant at the papers yesterday, an' I seen all about the big time these guys had when you rode the goat—"

"Rode—*what?"*

"When you was elected. Get me?"

I stared at him. He grinned in a friendly way.

"The privacy of those solemn proceedings should remain sacred. It were unfit to discuss such matters with the world at large," I said coldly.

"I get you," he rejoined cheerfully.

"What do you desire of me?" I repeated. "Why this unseemly apropos?"

"I was comin' to it. Perfessor, I'll be frank. I need money—"

"You need brains!"

"No," he said good-humoredly, "I've got 'em; plenty of 'em; I'm overstocked with idees. What I want to do is to sell *you* a few—"

"Do you know you are impudent!"

"Listen, friend. I seen a piece in the papers as how you was to make the speech of your life when you ride the goat for these here guys on April first—"

"I decline to listen—"

"*One* minute, friend! I want to ask you one thing! *What* are you going to talk about?"

I was already moving away but I stopped and stared at him.

"That's the question," he nodded with unimpaired cheerfulness, "*what* are you going to talk about on April *the* first? Remember it's the hot-air party of your life. *Ree*-member that each an' every paper in the United States will print what you say. Now, how about it, friend? Are you up in your lines?"

Swallowing my repulsion for him I said: "Why are you concerned as to what may be the subject of my approaching address?"

"There you are, Prof!" he exclaimed delightedly; "I want to do business with you. That's me! I'm frank about it. Say, there ought to be a wad of the joyful in it for us both—"

"What?"

"Sure. We can work it any old way. Take Tyng, Tyng and Company, the typewriter people. I'd be ashamed to tell you what I can get out o' them if you'll mention the Tyng-Tyng typewriter in your speech—"

"What you suggest is infamous!" I said haughtily.

"Believe *me* there's enough in it to make it a financial coup, and I ask you, Prof, isn't a financial coup respectable?"

"You seem to be morally unfitted to comprehend—"

"Pardon *me!* I'm fitted up regardless with all kinds of fixtures. I'm fixed to undertake anything. Now if you'd prefer the Bunsen Baby Biscuit bunch—why old man Bunsen would come across—"

"I won't do such things!" I said angrily.

"Very well, very well. Don't get riled, sir. That's only one way to build on Fifth Avenoo. I've got one hundred thousand other ways—"

"I don't want to talk to you—"

"They're honest—some of them. Say, if you want a stric'ly honest deal I've got the goods. Only it ain't as easy and the money ain't as big—"

"I don't want to talk to you—"

"Yes you do. You don't reelize it but you do. Why you're fixin' to make the holler of your life, ain't you? What are you goin' to say? Hey? What you aimin' to say to make those guys set up? What's the use of up-stagin'? Ain't you willing' to pay me a few plunks if I *dy*-vulge to you the most startlin' phenomena that has ever electrified civilization sense the era of P. T. Barnum!"

I was already hurrying away when the mention of that great scientist's name halted me once more.

The little flashy man had been tagging along at my heels, talking cheerfully and volubly all the while; and now, as I halted again, he struck an attitude, legs apart, thumbs hooked in his arm-pits, and his head cocked knowingly on one side.

"Prof," he said, "if you'd work in the Tyng-Tyng Company, or fix it up with Bunsen to mention his Baby Biscuits as the most nootritious of condeements, there'd be more in it for you an' me. But it's up to you."

"Well I won't!" I retorted.

"Very well, ve-ry well," he said soothingly. "Then look over another line o' samples. No trouble to show 'em—none at all, sir! Now if P. T. Barnum was alive—"

I said very seriously: "The name of that great discoverer falling from your illiterate lips has halted me a second time. His name alone invests your somewhat suspicious conversation with a dignity and authority heretofore conspicuously absent. If, as you hint, you have any scientific information for sale which P. T. Barnum might have considered worth purchasing, you may possibly find in me a client. Proceed, young sir."

"Say, listen, Bo—I mean, Prof. I've got the goods. Don't worry. I've got information in my think-box that would make your kick-in speech the event of the century. The question remains, do I get mine?"

"What is this scientific information?"

We had now walked as far as Riverside Drive. There were plenty of unoccupied benches. I sat down and he seated himself beside me.

For a few moments I gazed upon the magnificent view. Even he seemed awed by the proportions of the superb iron gas tank dominating the prospect.

I gazed at the colossal advertisements across the Hudson, at the freight trains below; I gazed upon the lordly Hudson itself, that majestic sewer which drains the Empire State, bearing within its resistless flood millions of tons of insoluble matter from that magic fairyland which we call "up-state," to the sea. And, thinking of disposal plants, I thought of that sublime paraphrase—"From the Mohawk to the Hudson, from the Hudson to the Sea."

"Bo," he said, "I gotta hand it to you. Them guys might have got wise if you had worked in the Tyng-Tyng Company or the Bunsen stuff. There was big money into it, but it might not have went."

I waited curiously.

"But this here dope I'm startin' in to cook for you is a straight, reelible, an' hones' pill. P. T. Barnum he would have went a million miles to see what I seen last Janooary down in the Coquina country—"

"Where is that?"

"Say; that's what costs money to know. When I put you wise I'm due to retire from actyve business. Get me?"

"Go on."

"Sure. I was down to the Coquina country, a-doin'—well, I was doin' rubes. I gotta be hones' with *you,* Prof. That's what I was a-doin' of—sellin' farms under water to suckers. Bee-u-tiful Florida! Own your own orange grove. Seven crops o' strawberries every winter in Gawd's own country—get me?"

He bestowed upon me a loathsome wink.

"Well, it went big till I made a break and got in Dutch with the Navy Department what was surveyin' the Everglades for a safe and sane harbor of refuge for the navy in time o' war.

"Sir, they was a-dredgin' up the farms I was sellin', an' the suckers heard of it an' squealed somethin' fierce, an' I had to hustle! Yes, sir, I had to git up an' mosey cross-lots. And what with the Federal Gov'ment chasin' me one way an' them rubes an' the sheriff of Pickalocka County racin' me t'other, I got lost for fair—yes, sir."

He smiled reminiscently, produced from his pockets the cold and offensive remains of a partly consumed cigar, and examined it critically. Then he requested a match.

"I shall now pass over lightly or in subdood silence the painful events of my flight," he remarked, waving his cigar and expelling a long squirt of smoke from his unshaven lips. "Surfice it to say that I got everythin' that was comin' to me, an' then some, what with snakes and murskeeters, an' briers an' mud, an' hunger an' thirst an' heat. Wasn't there a wop named Pizarro or somethin' what got lost down in Florida? Well, he's got nothin' on me. I never want to see the dam' state again. But I'll go back if *you* say so!"

His small rat eyes rested musingly upon the river; he sucked thoughtfully at his cigar, hooked one soiled thumb into the armhole of his fancy vest and crossed his legs.

"To resoom," he said cheerily; "I come out one day, half nood, onto the banks of the Miami River. The rest was a pipe after what I had went through.

"I trimmed a guy at Miami, got clothes and railroad fare, an' ducked.

"Now the valyble portion of my discourse is this here partial information concernin' what I seen—or rather what I run onto durin' my crool flight from my ree-lentless persecutors.

"An' these here is the facts: There is, contrary to maps, Coast Survey guys, an' general opinion, a range of hills in Florida, made entirely of coquina.

"It's a good big range, too, fifty miles long an' anywhere from one to five miles acrost.

"An' what I've got to say is this: Into them there Coquina hills there still lives the expirin' remains of the cave-men—"

"What!" I exclaimed incredulously.

"Or," he continued calmly, "to speak more stric'ly, the few individools of that there expirin' race is now totally reduced to a few women."

"Your statement is wild—"

"No; but *they're* wild. I seen 'em. Bein' extreemly bee-utiful I approached nearer, but they hove rocks at me, they did, an' they run into the rocks like squir'ls, they did, an' I was too much on the blink to stick around whistlin' for dearie.

"But I seen 'em; they was all dolled up in the skins of wild annermals. When I see the first one she was eatin' onto a ear of corn, an' I nearly ketched her, but she run like hellnall—yes, sir. Just like that.

"So next I looked for some cave guy to waltz up an' paste me, but no. An' after I had went through them dam' Coquina mountains I reelized that there was nary a guy left in this here expirin' race, only women, an' only about a dozen o' them."

He ceased, meditatively expelled a cloud of pungent smoke, and folded his arms.

"Of course," said I with a sneer, "you have proofs to back your pleasant tale?"

"Sure. I made a map."

"I see," said I sarcastically. "You propose to have me pay you for that map?"

"Sure."

"How much, my confiding friend?"

"Ten thousand plunks."

I began to laugh. He laughed, too: "You'll pay 'em if you take my map an' go to the Coquina hills," he said.

I stopped laughing: "Do you mean that I am to go there and investigate before I pay you for this information?"

"Sure. If the goods ain't up to sample the deal is off."

"Sample? What sample?" I demanded derisively.

He made a gesture with one soiled hand as though quieting a balky horse.

"I took a snapshot, friend. You wanta take a slant at it?"

"You took a photograph of one of these alleged cave-dwellers?"

"I took ten but when these here cave-ladies hove rocks at me the fillums was put on the blink—all excep' this one which I dee-veloped an' printed."

He drew from his inner coat pocket a photograph and handed it to me—the most amazing photograph I ever gazed upon. Astounded, almost convinced I sat looking at this irrefutable evidence in silence. The smoke of his cigar drifting into my face aroused me from a sort of dazed inertia.

"Listen," I said, half strangled, "are you willing to wait for payment until I personally have verified the existence of these—er—creatures?"

"You betcher! When you have went there an' have saw the goods, just let me have mine if they're up to sample. Is that right?"

"It seems perfectly fair."

"It is fair. I wouldn't try to do a scientific guy—no, sir. Me without no eddycation, only brains? Fat chance I'd have to put one over on a Academy sport what's chuck-a-block with Latin an' Greek an' scientific stuff an' all like that!"

I admitted to myself that he'd stand no chance.

"Is it a go?" he asked.

"Where is the map?" I inquired, trembling internally with excitement.

"Ha—ha!" he said. "Listen to my mirth! The map is inside here, old sport!" and he tapped his retreating forehead with one nicotine-stained finger.

"I see," said I, trying to speak carelessly; "you desire to pilot me."

"I don't desire to but I gotta go with you."

"An accurate map—"

"Can it, old sport! A accurate map is all right when it's pasted over the front of your head for a face. But I wear the other kind of map *inside* me conk. Get me?"

"I confess that I do not."

"Well, get *this*, then. It's a cash deal. If the goods is up to sample you hand me mine then an' there. I don't deliver no goods f.o.b. I shows 'em to you. After you have saw them it's up to you to round 'em up. That's all, as they say when our great President pulls a gun. There ain't goin' to be no shootin'; walk out quietly, ladies!"

After I had sat there for fully ten minutes staring at him I came to the only logical conclusion possible to a scientific mind.

I said: "You are, admittedly, unlettered; you are confessedly a chevalier of industry; personally, you are exceedingly distasteful to me. But it is useless to deny that you are the most extraordinary man I ever saw. . . . How soon can you take me to these Coquina hills?"

"Gimme twenty-four hours to—fix things," he said gaily.

"Is that all?"

"It's plenty, I guess. An'—say!"

"What?"

"It's a stric'ly cash deal. Get me?"

"I shall have with me a certified check for ten thousand dollars. Also a pair of automatics."

He laughed: "Huh!" he said, "I could loco your cabbage palm soup if I was *that* kind! I'm on the level, Perfessor. If I wasn't I could get you in about a hundred styles while you was blinkin' at what you was thinkin' about. But I ain't no gun-man. You hadn't oughta pull that stuff on me. I've give you your chanst; take it or leave it."

I pondered profoundly for another ten minutes. And at last my decision was irrevocably reached.

"It's a bargain," I said firmly. "What is your name?"

"Sam Mink. Write it Samuel onto that there certyfied check—if you can spare the extra seconds from your valooble time."

II

On Monday, the first day of March, 1915, about 10:30 A.M., we came in sight of something which, until I had met Mink, I never had dreamed existed in southern Florida—a high range of hills.

It had been an eventless journey from New York to Miami, from Miami to Fort Coquina; but from there through an absolutely pathless wilderness as far as I could make out, the journey had been exasperating.

Where we went I do not know even now: sawgrass and water, hammock and shell mound, palm forests, swamps, wildernesses of water-oak and live-oak, vast stretches of pine, lagoons, sloughs, branches, muddy creeks, reedy reaches from which wild fowl rose in clouds where alligators lurked or lumbered about after stranded fish, horrible mangrove thickets full of moccasins and water-turkeys, heronry more horrible still, out of which the heat from a vertical sun distilled the last atom of nauseating effluvia—all these choice spots we visited under the guidance of the wretched Mink. I seemed to be missing nothing that might discourage or disgust me.

He appeared to know the way, somehow, although my compass became mysteriously lost the first day out from Fort Coquina.

Again and again I felt instinctively that we were travelling in a vast circle, but Mink always denied it, and I had no scientific instruments to verify my deepening suspicions.

Another thing bothered me: Mink did not seem to suffer from insects or heat; in fact, to my intense annoyance, he appeared to be having a comfortable time of it, eating and drinking with gusto, sleeping snugly under a mosquito bar, permitting me to do all camp work, the paddling as long as we used a canoe, and all the cooking, too, claiming, on his part, a complete ignorance of culinary art.

Sometimes he condescended to catch a few fish for the common pan; sometimes he bestirred himself to shoot a duck or two. But usually he played on his concertina during his leisure moments which were plentiful.

I began to detest Samuel Mink.

At first I was murderously suspicious of him, and I walked about with my automatic arsenal ostentatiously displayed. But he looked like such a miserable shrimp that I became ashamed of my precautions. Besides, as he cheerfully pointed out, a little koonti soaked in my drinking water, would have done my business for me if he had meant me any physical harm. Also he had a horrid habit of noosing moccasins for sport; and it would have been easy for him to introduce one to me while I slept.

Really what most worried me was the feeling which I could not throw off that somehow or other we were making very little progress in any particular direction.

He even admitted that there was reason for my doubts, but he confided to me that to find these Coquina hills, was like traversing a maze. Doubling to and fro among forests and swamps, he insisted, was the only possible path of access to the undiscovered Coquina hills of Florida. Otherwise, he argued, these Coquina hills would long ago have been discovered.

And it seemed to me that he had been right when at last we came out on the edge of a palm forest and beheld that astounding blue outline of hills in a country which has always been supposed to lie as flat as a flabby flap-jack.

A desert of saw-palmetto stretched away before us to the base of the hills; game trails ran through it in every direction like sheep paths; a few moth-eaten Florida deer trotted away as we appeared.

Into one of these trails stepped Samuel Mink, burdened only with his concertina and a box of cigars. I, loaded with seventy pounds of impedimenta including a moving-picture apparatus, reeled after him.

He walked on jauntily toward the hills, his pearl-coloured bowler hat at an angle. Occasionally he played upon his concertina as he advanced; now and then he cut a pigeon wing. I hated him. At every toilsome step I hated him more deeply. He played "Tipperary" on his concertina.

"See 'em, old top?" he inquired, nodding toward the hills. "I'm a man of my word, I am. Look at 'em! Take 'em in, old sport! An' reemember, each an' every hill is guaranteed to contain one bony fidy cave-lady what is the last vanishin' traces of a extinc' an' dissappeerin' race!"

We toiled on—that is, I did, bowed under my sweating load of paraphernalia. He skipped in advance like some degenerate twentieth century faun, playing on his pipes the unmitigated melodies of George Cohan.

"Watch your step!" he cried, nimbly avoiding the attentions of a ground-rattler which tried to caress his ankle from under a saw-palmetto.

With a shudder I gave the deadly little reptile room and floundered forward a prey to exhaustion, melancholy, and red-bugs. A few buzzards kept pace with me, their broad, black shadows gliding ominously over the sun-drenched earth; blue-tail lizards went rustling and leaping away on every side; floppy soft-winged butterflies escorted me; a strange bird which seemed to be dressed in a union suit of checked gingham, flew from tree to tree as I plodded on, and squealed at me persistently.

At last I felt the hard coquina under foot; the cool blue shadow of the hills enveloped me; I slipped off my pack, dumped it beside a little rill of crystal water which ran sparkling from the hills, and sat down on a soft and fragrant carpet of hound's-tongue.

After a while I drank my fill at the rill, bathed head, neck, face and arms, and, feeling delightfully refreshed, leaned back against the fern-covered slab of coquina.

"What are you doing?" I demanded of Mink who was unpacking the kit and disengaging the moving-picture machine.

"Gettin' ready," he replied, fussing busily with the camera.

"You don't expect to see any cave people here, do you?" I asked with a thrill of reviving excitement.

"Why not?"

"Here?"

"Cert'nly. Why the first one I seen was a-drinkin' into this brook."

"Here! Where I'm sitting?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes, sir, right there. It was this way: I was lyin' down, tryin' to figure the shortes' way to Fort Coquina, an' wishin' I was nearer Broadway than I was to the Equator, when I heard a voice say, 'Blub-blub, muck-a-muck!' an' then I seen two cave-ladies come sof'ly stealin' along."

"W-where?"

"Right there where you are a-sittin'. Say, they was lookers! An' they come along quiet like two big-eyed deer, kinder nosin' the air and listenin'.

"'Gee whiz,' thinks I, 'Longacre ain't got so much on them dames!' An' at that one o' them wore a wild-cat's skin an' that's all—an' a wild-cat ain't big. And t'other she sported pa'm-leaf pyjamas.

"So when they don't see nothin' around to hinder, they just lays down flat and takes a drink into that pool, lookin' up every swallow like little birds listenin' and kinder thankin' God for a good square drink.

"I knowed they was wild girls soon as I seen 'em. Also they sez to one another, 'Blub-blub!' Kinder sof'ly. All the same I've seen wilder ladies on Broadway so I took a chanst where I was squattin' behind a rock.

"So sez I, 'Ah there, sweetie Blub-blub! Have a taxi on me!' An' with that they is on their feet, quiverin' all over an' nosin' the wind. So first I took some snapshots at 'em with my Bijoo camera.

"I guess they scented me all right for I seen their eyes grow bigger, an' then they give a bound an' was off over the rocks; an' me after 'em. Say, that was some steeple-chase until a few more cave-ladies come out on them rocks above us an' hove chunks of coquina at me.

"An' with all that dodgin' an' duckin' of them there rocks the cave-girls got away; an' I seen 'em an' the other cave-ladies scurryin' into little caves—one whisked into this hole, another scuttled into that—bing! all over!

"All I could think of was to light a cigar an' blow the smoke in after the best-lookin' cave-girl. But I couldn't smoke her out, an' I hadn't time to starve her out. So that's all I know about this here preehistoric an' extinc' race o' vanishin' cave-ladies."

As his simple and illiterate narrative advanced I became proportionally excited; and, when he ended, I sprang to my feet in an uncontrollable access of scientific enthusiasm:

"Was she really pretty?" I asked.

"Listen, she was that peachy—"

"Enough!" I cried. "Science expects every man to do his duty! Are your films ready to record a scene without precedent in the scientific annals of creation?"

"They sure is!"

"Then place your camera and your person in a strategic position. This is a magnificent spot for an ambush! Come over beside me!"

He came across to where I had taken cover among the ferns behind the parapet of coquina, and with a thrill of pardonable joy I watched him unlimber his photographic artillery and place it in battery where my every posture and action would be recorded for posterity if a cave-lady came down to the water-hole to drink.

"It were futile," I explained to him in a guarded voice, "for me to attempt to cajole her as you attempted it. Neither playful nor moral suasion could avail, for it is certain that no cave-lady understands English."

"I thought o' that, too," he remarked. "I said, 'Blub-blub! muck-a-muck!' to 'em when they started to run, but it didn't do no good."

I smiled: "Doubtless," said I, "the spoken language of the cave-dweller is made up of similarly primitive exclamations, and you were quite right in attempting to communicate with the cave-ladies and establish a cordial entente. Professor Garner has done so among the Simian population of Gaboon. Your attempt is most creditable and I shall make it part of my record.

"But the main idea is to capture a living specimen of cave-lady, and corroborate every detail of that pursuit and capture upon the films.

"And believe me, Mr. Mink," I added, my voice trembling with emotion, "no Academician is likely to go to sleep when I illustrate my address with such pictures as you are now about to take!"

"The police might pull the show," he suggested.

"No," said I, "Science is already immune; art is becoming so. Only nature need fear the violence of prejudice; and doubtless she will continue to wear pantalettes and common-sense nighties as long as our great republic endures."

I unslung my field-glasses, adjusted them and took a penetrating squint at the hillside above.

Nothing stirred up there except a buzzard or two wheeling on tip-curled pinions above the palms.

Presently Mink inquired whether I had "lamped" anything, and I replied that I had not.

"They may be snoozin' in their caves," he suggested. "But don't you fret, old top; you'll get what's comin' to you and I'll get mine."

"About that check—" I began and hesitated.

"Sure. What about it?"

"I suppose I'm to give it to you when the first cave-woman appears."

"That's what!"

I pondered the matter for a while in silence. I could see no risk in paying him this draft on sight.

"All right," I said. "Bring on your cave-dwellers."

Hour succeeded hour, but no cave-dwellers came down to the pool to drink. We ate luncheon—a bit of cold duck, some koonti-bread, and a dish of palm-cabbage. I smoked an inexpensive cigar; Mink lit a more pretentious one. Afterward he played on his concertina at my suggestion on the chance that the music might lure a cave-girl down the hill. Nymphs were sometimes caught that way, and modern science seems to be reverting more and more closely to the simpler truths of the classics which, in our ignorance and arrogance, we once dismissed as fables unworthy of scientific notice.

However this Broadway faun piped in vain: no white-footed dryad came stealing through the ferns to gaze, perhaps to dance to the concertina's plaintive melodies.

So after a while he put his concertina into his pocket, cocked his derby hat on one side, gathered his little bandy legs under his person, and squatted there in silence, chewing the wet and bitter end of his extinct cigar.

Toward mid-afternoon I unslung my field-glasses again and surveyed the hill.

At first I noticed nothing, not even a buzzard; then, of a sudden, my attention was attracted to something moving among the fern-covered slabs of coquina just above where we lay concealed—a slim, graceful shape half shadowed under a veil of lustrous hair which glittered like gold in the sun.

"Mink!" I whispered hoarsely. "One of them is coming! This—this indeed is the stupendous and crowning climax of my scientific career!"

His comment was incredibly coarse: "Gimme the dough," he said without a tremor of surprise. Indeed there was a metallic ring of menace in his low and entirely cold tones as he laid one hand on my arm. "No welchin'," he said, "or I put the whole show on the bum!"

The overwhelming excitement of the approaching crisis neutralized my disgust; I fished out the certified check from my pocket and flung the miserable scrap of paper at him. "Get your machine ready!" I hissed. "Do you understand what these moments mean to the civilized world!"

"I sure do," he said.

Nearer and nearer came the lithe white figure under its glorious crown of hair, moving warily and gracefully amid the great coquina slabs—nearer, nearer, until I no longer required my glasses.

She was a slender red-lipped thing, blue-eyed, dainty of hand and foot.

The spotted pelt of a wild-cat covered her, or attempted to.

I unfolded a large canvas sack as she approached the pool. For a moment or two she stood gazing around her and her close-set ears seemed to be listening. Then, apparently satisfied, she threw back her beautiful young head and sent a sweet wild call floating back to the sunny hillside.

"Blub-blub!" rang her silvery voice; "blub-blub! Muck-a-muck!" And from the fern-covered hollows above other voices replied joyously to her reassuring call, "Blub-blub-blub!"

The whole bunch was coming down to drink—the entire remnant of a prehistoric and almost extinct race of human creatures was coming to quench its thirst at this water-hole. How I wished for James Barnes at the camera's crank! He alone could do justice to this golden girl before me.

One by one, clad in their simple yet modest gowns of pelts and garlands, five exquisitively superb specimens of cave-girl came gracefully down to the water-hole to drink.

Almost swooning with scientific excitement I whispered to the unspeakable Mink: "Begin to crank as soon as I move!" And, gathering up my big canvas sack I rose, and, still crouching, stole through the ferns on tip-toe.

They had already begun to drink when they heard me; I must have made some slight sound in the ferns, for their keen ears detected it and they sprang to their feet.

It was a magnificent sight to see them there by the pool, tense, motionless, at gaze, their dainty noses to the wind, their beautiful eyes wide and alert.

For a moment, enchanted, I remained spellbound in the presence of this prehistoric spectacle, then, waving my sack, I sprang out from behind the rock and cantered toward them.

Instead of scattering and flying up the hillside they seemed paralyzed, huddling together as though to get into the picture. Delighted I turned and glanced at Mink; he was cranking furiously.

With an uncontrollable shout of triumph and delight I pranced toward the huddling cave-girls, arms outspread as though heading a horse or concentrating chickens. And, totally forgetting the uselessness of urbanity and civilized speech as I danced around that lovely but terrified group, "Ladies!" I cried, "do not be alarmed, because I mean only kindness and proper respect. Civilization calls you from the wilds! Sentiment, pity, piety propel my legs, not the ruthless desire to injure or enslave you! Ladies! You are under the wing of science. An anthropologist is speaking to you! Fear nothing! Rather rejoice! Your wonderful race shall be rescued from extinction—even if I have to do it myself! Ladies, don't run!" They had suddenly scattered and were now beginning to dodge me. "I come among you bearing the precious promises of education, of religion, of equal franchise, of fashion!"

"Blub-blub!" they whimpered continuing to dodge me.

"Yes!" I cried in an excess of transcendental enthusiasm. "Blub-blub! And though I do not comprehend the exquisite simplicity of your primeval speech, I answer with all my heart, 'Blub-blub!'"

Meanwhile, they were dodging and eluding me as I chased first one, then another, one hand outstretched, the other invitingly clutching the sack.

A hasty glance at Mink now and then revealed him industriously cranking away.

Once I fell into the pool. That section of the film should never be released, I determined, as I blew the water out of my mouth, gasped, and started after a lovely, ruddy-haired cave-girl whose curiosity had led her to linger beside the pool in which I was floundering.

But run as fast as I could and skip hither and thither with all the agility I could muster I did not seem to be able to seize a single cave-girl.

Every few minutes, baffled and breathless, I rested; and they always clustered together uttering their plaintively musical "blub-blub," not apparently very much afraid of me, and even exhibiting curiosity. Now and then they cast glances toward Mink who was grinding away steadily, and I could scarcely retain a shout of joy as I realized what wonderful pictures he was taking. Indeed luck seemed to be with me, so far, for never once did these beautiful prehistoric creatures retire out of photographic range.

But otherwise the problem was becoming serious. I could not catch one of them; they eluded me with maddening swiftness and grace; my pauses to recover my breath became more frequent.

At last, dead beat, I sat down on a slab of coquina. And when I was able to articulate I turned around toward Mink.

"You'll have to drop your camera and come over and help me," I panted. "I'm all in!"

"Not quite," he said.

For a moment I did not understand him; then under my outraged eyes, and within the hearing of my horrified ears a terrible thing occurred.

"Now, ladies!" yelled Mink, "all on for the fineally! Up-stage there, you red-headed little spot-crabber! Mabel! Take the call! Now smile the whole bloomin' bunch of you!"

What was he saying? I did not comprehend. I stared dully at the six cave-girls as they grouped themselves in a semi-circle behind me.

Then, as one of them came up and unfolded a white strip of cloth behind my head, the others drew from concealed pockets in their kilts of cat-fur, little silk flags of all nations and began to wave them.

Paralyzed I turned my head. On the strip of white cloth, which the tallest cave-girl was holding directly behind my head, was printed in large black letters:

SUNSET SOAP

For one cataclysmic instant I gazed upon this hideous spectacle, then with an unearthly cry I collapsed into the arms of the nicest looking one.

There is little more to say. Contrary to my fears the release of this outrageous film did not injure my scientific standing. Modern science, accustomed to proprietary testimonials, has become reconciled to such things.

My appearance upon the films in the movies in behalf of Sunset Soap, oddly enough, seemed to enhance my scientific reputation. Even such austere purists as Guilford, the Cubist poet, congratulated me upon my fearless independence of ethical tradition.

And I had lived to learn a gentler truth than that, for, the pretty girl who had been cast for Cave-girl No. 3— But let that pass. *Adhibenda est in jocando moderatio.*

Sweet are the uses of adver-tisement. ❋

The Ladies of the Lake

I

At the suggestion of several hundred thousand ladies desiring to revel and possibly riot in the saturnalia of equal franchise, the unnamed lakes in that vast and little known region in Alaska bounded by the Ylanqui River and the Thunder Mountains were now being inexorably named after women.

It was a beautiful thought. Already several exquisite, lonely bits of water, gem-set among the eternal peaks, mirrors for cloud and soaring eagle, a glass for the moon as keystone to the towering arch of stars, had been irrevocably labelled.

Already there was Lake Amelia Jones, Lake Sadie Dingleheimer, Lake Maggie McFadden, and Lake Mrs. Gladys Doolittle Batt.

I longed to see these lakes under the glamour of their newly added beauty.

Imagine, therefore, my surprise and happiness when I received the following communication from my revered and beloved chief, Professor Farrago, dated from the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, whither he had been summoned in haste to examine and pronounce upon the identity of a very small bird supposed to be a specimen of that rare and almost extinct creature, the two-toed titmouse, *Mustitta duototus*, to be scientifically exact, as I invariably strive to be.

The important letter in question was as follows:

To
Percy Smith, B.S., D.F., etc., etc.,
Curator, Department of Anthropology,
Administration Building,
Bronx Park, N.Y.

My Dear Mr. Smith:

Several very important and determined ladies, recently honoured by the Government in having a number of lakes in Alaska named after them, have decided to make a pilgrimage to that region, inspired by a characteristic desire to gaze upon the lakes named after them individually.

They request information upon the following points:

1st. Are the waters of the lakes in that locality sufficiently clear for a lady to do her hair by? In that event, the expedition will not burden itself with looking-glasses.

2nd. Are there any hotels? (You need merely say, no. I have tried to explain to them that it is, for the most part, an unexplored wilderness, but they insist upon further information from you.)

3rd. If there are hotels, is there also running water to be had? (You may tell them that there is plenty of running water.)

4th. What are the summer outdoor amusements? (You may inform them that there is plenty of bathing, boating, fishing, and an abundance of shade trees. Also, excellent mountain-climbing to be had in the vicinity. You need not mention the pastimes of "Hunt the Flea" or "Dodge the Skeeter.")

I am not by nature cruel, Mr. Smith, but when these ladies informed me that they had decided to penetrate that howling and unexplored wilderness without being burdened or interfered with by any member of my sex, for one horrid and criminal moment I hoped they would. Because in that event none of them would ever come back.

However, in my heart milder and more humane sentiments prevailed. I pointed out to them the peril of their undertaking, the dangers of an unexplored region, the necessity of masculine guidance and support.

My earnestness and solicitude were, I admit, prompted partly by a desire to utilize this expensively projected expedition as a vehicle for the accumulation of scientific data.

As soon as I heard of it I conceived the plan of attaching two members of our Bronx Park scientific staff to the expedition—you, and Mr. Brown.

But no sooner did these determined ladies hear of it than they repelled the suggestion with indignation.

Now, the matter stands as follows: These ladies don't want any man in the expedition; but they have at last realized that they've got to take a guide or two. And there are no feminine guides in Alaska.

Therefore, considering the immense and vital importance of such an opportunity to explore and report upon this unknown region at somebody else's expense, I suggest that you and Brown meet these ladies at Lake Mrs. Susan W. Pillsbury, which lies on the edge of the region to be explored; that you, without actually perjuring yourselves too horribly, convey to them the misleading impression that you are the promised guides provided for them by a cowed and avuncular Government; and that

> you take these fearsome ladies about and let them gaze at their reflections in the various lakes named after them; and that, while the expedition lasts, you secretly make such observations, notes, reports, and collections of the flora and fauna of the region as your opportunities may permit.
>
> No time is to be lost. If, at Lake Susan W. Pillsbury, you find regular guides awaiting these ladies, you will bribe these guides to go away and you yourselves will then impersonate the guides. I know of no other way for you to explore this region, as all our available resources at Bronx Park have already been spent in painting appropriate scenery to line the cages of the mammalia, and also in the present exceedingly expensive expedition in search of the polka-dotted boom-bock, which is supposed to inhabit the jungle beyond Lake Niggerplug.
>
> My most solemn and sincere wishes accompany you. Bless you!
>
> FARRAGO.

II

This, then, is how it came about that "Kitten" Brown and I were seated, one midgeful morning in July, by the pellucid waters of Lake Susan W. Pillsbury, gnawing sections from a greasily fried trout, upon which I had attempted culinary operations.

Brown's baptismal name was William; but the unfortunate young man was once discovered indiscreetly embracing a pretty assistant in the Administration Building at Bronx, and, furthermore, was overheard to address her as "Kitten."

So Kitten Brown it was for him in future. After he had fought all the younger members of the scientific staff in turn, he gradually became resigned to this annoying *nom d'amour*.

Lightly but thoroughly equipped for scientific field research, we had arrived at the rendezvous in time to bribe the two guides engaged by the Government to go back to their own firesides.

A week later the formidable expedition of representative ladies arrived; and now they were sitting on the shore of Lake Susan W. Pillsbury, at a little distance from us, trying to keep the midges from their features and attempting to eat the fare provided for them by me.

I myself couldn't eat it. No wonder they murmured. But hunger goaded them to attack the greasy mess of trout and fried cornmeal.

Kitten was saying to me:

"Our medicine chest isn't very extensive. I hope they brought their own. If they didn't, some among us will never again see New York."

I stole a furtive glance at the unfortunate women. There was *one* among them—but let me first enumerate their heavy artillery:

There was the Reverend Dr. Amelia Jones, blond, adipose, and close to the four-score mark. She stepped high in the Equal Franchise ranks. Nobody had ever had the temerity to answer her back.

There was Miss Sadie Dingleheimer, fifty, emaciated, anemic, and gauntly glittering with thick-lensed eye-glasses. She was the President of the National Prophylactic Club, whatever that may be.

There was Miss Margaret McFadden, a Titian, profusely toothed, muscular, and President of the Hair Dressers' Union of the United States.

There was Mrs. Gladys Doolittle Batt, a grass one—Batt being represented as a vanishing point—President of the National Eugenic and Purity League; tall, gnarled, sinuously powerful, and prone to emotional attacks. The attacks were directed toward others.

These, then, composed the heavy artillery. The artillery of the light brigade consisted only of a single piece. Her name was Angelica White, a delegate from the Trained Nurses' Association of America. The nurses had been too busy with their business to attend such picnics, so one had been selected by lot to represent the busy Association on this expedition.

Angelica White was a tall, fair, yellow-haired girl of twenty-two or three, with violet-blue eyes and red lips, and a way of smiling a little when spoken to—but let that pass. I mean only to be scientifically minute. A passion for fact has ever obsessed me. I have little literary ability and less desire to sully my pen with that degraded form of letters known as fiction. Once in my life my mania for accuracy involved me lyrically. It was a short poem, but an earnest one:

Truth is mighty and must prevail,
Otherwise it were inadvisable to tell the tale.

I bestowed it upon the New York *Evening Post*, but declined remuneration. My message belonged to the world. I don't mean the newspaper.

Her eyes, then, were tinted with that indefinable and agreeable nuance which modifies blue to a lilac or violet hue.

Watching her askance, I was deeply sorry that my cooking seemed to pain her.

"Guide!" said Mrs. Doolittle Batt, in that remarkable, booming voice of hers.

"Ma'am!" said Kitten Brown and I with spontaneous alacrity, leaping from the ground as though shot at.

"This cooking," she said, with an ominous stare at us, "is atrocious. Don't you know how to cook?"

I said with a smiling attempt at ease:

"There are various ways of cooking food for the several species of mammalia which all-wise Providence—"

"Do you think you're cooking for wild-cats?" she demanded.

Our smiles faded.

"It's my opinion that you're incompetent," remarked the Reverend Dr. Jones, slapping at midges with a hand that might have rocked all the cradles of the nation, but had not rocked any.

"We're not getting our money's worth," said Miss Dingleheimer, "even if the Government does pay your salaries."

I looked appealingly from one stony face to another. In Miss McFadden's eye there was the sombre glint of battle. She said:

"If you can guide us no better than you cook, God save us all this day week!" And she hurled the contents of her tin plate into Lake Susan W. Pillsbury.

Mrs. Doolittle Batt arose:

"Come," she said; "it is time we started. What is the name of the first lake we may hope to encounter?"

We knew no more than did they, but we said that Lake Gladys Doolittle Batt was the first, hoping to placate that fearsome woman.

"Come on, then!" she cried, picking up her carved and varnished mountain staff.

Miss Dingleheimer had brought one, too, from the Catskills.

So Kitten Brown and I loaded our mule, set him in motion, and drove him forward into the unknown.

Where we were going we had not the slightest idea; the margin of the lake was easy travelling, so easy that we never noticed that we had already gone around the lake three times, until Mrs. Batt recognized the fact and turned on us furiously.

I didn't know how to explain it, except to say feebly that I was doing it as a sort of preliminary canter to harden and inure the ladies.

"We don't need hardening!" she snarled. "Do you understand that!"

I comprehended that at once. But I forced a sickly smile and skipped forward in the wake of my mule, with something of the same abandon which characterizes the flight of an unwelcome dog.

In the terrified ear of Kitten I voiced my doubts concerning the prospects of a pleasant journey.

We marched in the following order: Arthur, the heavily laden mule, led; then came Kitten Brown and myself, all hung over with stew-pans, shot-guns, rifles, cartridge-belts, ponchos, and the toilet reticules of the ladies; then marched the Reverend Dr. Jones, and, in order, filing behind her, Miss Dingleheimer, Mrs. Batt, Miss McFadden, and Miss White—the latter in her trained nurse's costume and wearing a red cross on her sleeve—an idea of Mrs. Batt, who believed in emergency methods.

Mrs. Batt also bore a banner, much interfered with by the foliage, bearing the inscription:

EQUAL RIGHTS!
EUGENICS OR EXTERMINATION!

After a while she shouted:

"Guide! Here, you may carry this banner for a while! I'm tired."

Kitten and I took turns with it after that. It was hard work, particularly as one by one in turn they came up and hung their parasols and shopping reticules all over us. We plodded forward like a pair of moving department stores, not daring to shift our burdens to Arthur, because we had already stuffed into the panniers of that simple and dignified animal all our collecting boxes, cyanide jars, butterfly nets, note-books, reels of piano wire, thermometers, barometers, hydrometers, stereometers, aeronoids, adnoids—everything, in fact, that guides are not supposed to pack into the woods, but which we had smuggled unbeknown to those misguided ones we guided.

And, to make room for our scientific paraphernalia, we had been obliged to do a thing so mean, so inexpressibly low, that I blush to relate it. But facts are facts; we discarded nearly a ton of feminine impedimenta. There was fancy work of all sorts in the making or in the raw—materials for knitting, embroidering, tatting, sewing, hemming, stitching, drawn-work, lace-making, crocheting.

Also we disposed of almost half a ton of toilet necessities—powder, perfumery, cosmetics, hot-water bags, slippers, negligees, novels, magazines, bon-bons, chewing-gum, hat-boxes, gloves, stockings, underwear.

We left enough apparel for each lady to change once. They'd have to do some scrubbing now. Science can not be halted by hatpins; cosmos can not be side-tracked by cosmetics.

Toward sunset we came upon a small, crystal clear pond, set between the bases of several lofty mountains. I was ready to drop with fatigue, but I nerved myself, drew a deep, exultant breath, and with one of those fine, sweeping gestures, I cried:

"Lake Mrs. Gladys Doolittle Batt! Eureka! At last! Excelsior!"

There was a profound silence behind me. I turned, striving to mask my apprehension with a smile. The ladies were regarding the pond in surprise. I admit that it was a pond, not a lake.

Injecting into my voice the last remnants of glee which I could summon, I shouted, "Eureka!" and began to caper about as though the size and beauty of the pond had affected me with irrepressible enthusiasm, hoping by my emotion to stampede the convention.

The cold voice of Mrs. Doolittle Batt checked my transports:

"Is that puddle named after *me?*" she demanded.

"M-ma'am?" I stammered.

"If that wretched frog-pond has been christened with my name, somebody is going to get into trouble," she said ominously.

A profound silence ensued. Arthur patiently switched at flies. As for me, I looked up at the majestic pines, gazed upon the lofty and eternal hills, then ventured a sneaking glance all around me. But I could discover no avenue of escape in case Mrs. Batt should charge me.

"I had been informed," she began dangerously, "that the majestic body of water, which I understood had been honoured with my name, was twelve miles long and three miles wide. *This* appears to be a puddle!"

"B-b-but it's very p-pretty," I protested feebly. "It's quite round and clear, and it's nearly a quarter of a mile in d-diameter—"

"Mind your business!" retorted Mrs. Doolittle Batt. "I've been swindled!"

Kitten Brown knew more about women than did I. He said in a fairly steady voice:

"Madame, it *is* an outrage! The women of this mighty nation should make the Government answerable for its duplicity! Your lake should have been at least twenty miles long!"

Everybody turned and looked at Kitten. He was a handsome dog.

"This young man appears to have some trace of common-sense," said Mrs. Batt. "I shall see to it that the Government is held responsible for this odious act of insulting duplicity. I—I won't have my name given to this—this wallow!—" She advanced toward me, her small eyes blazing: I retreated to leeward of Arthur.

"Guide!" she said in a voice still trembling with passion. "Are you certain that you have made no mistake? You appear to be unusually ignorant."

"I am afraid there can be no room for doubt," I said, almost scared out of my senses.

"And on top of this outrage, am I to eat your cooking?" she demanded passionately. "Did I come here to look at this frog-pond and choke on your cooking? *Did* I?"

"*I* can cook," said a clear, pleasant voice at my elbow. And Miss White came forward, cool, clean, fresh as a posy in her uniform and cap. I immediately got behind her.

"I can cook very nicely," she said smilingly. "It is part of my profession, you know. So if you two guides will be kind enough to build the fire and help me—" She let her violet eyes linger on me for an instant, then on

Brown. A moment later he and I were jostling each other in our eagerness to obey her slightest suggestion. It is that way with men.

So we built her a fire and unpacked our provisions, and we waited very politely on the ladies when dinner was ready.

It was a fine dinner—coffee, bacon, flap-jacks, soup, ash-bread, stewed chicken.

The heavy artillery, made ravenous by their journey, required vast quantities of ammunition. They banqueted largely. I gazed in amazement at Mrs. Doolittle Batt as she swallowed one flap-jack after another, while her eyes bulged larger and larger.

Nor was the capacity of Miss Dingleheimer and the Reverend Dr. Jones to be mocked at by pachyderms.

Brown and I left them eating while we erected the row of little tents. Every lady had demanded a separate tent.

So we cut saplings, set up the silk, drove pegs, and brought armfuls of balsam boughs.

I was afraid they'd demand their knitting and other utensils, but they had eaten to repletion, and were sleepy; and as each toilet case or reticule contained also a nightgown, they drew the flaps of their several tents without insisting that we unpack Arthur's panniers.

They all had disappeared within their tents except Miss White, who insisted on cooking something for us, although we protested that the scraps of the banquet were all right for mere guides.

She stood beside us for a few minutes, watching us busy with our delicious dinner.

"You poor fellows," she said gently. "You are nearly starved."

It is agreeable to be sympathized with by a tall, fair, fresh young girl. We looked up, simpering gratefully.

"This is really a most lovely little lake," she said, gazing out across the still, crystalline water which was all rose and gold in the sunset, save where the sombre shapes of the towering mountains were mirrored in glassy depths.

"It's odd," I said, "that no trout are jumping. There ought to be lots of them there, and this is their jumping hour."

We all looked at the quiet, oval bit of water. Not a circle, not the slightest ripple disturbed it.

"It must be deep," remarked Brown.

We gazed up at the three lofty peaks, the bases of which were the shores of this tiny gem among lakes. Deep, deep, plunging down into dusky profundity, the rocks fell away sheer into limpid depths.

"That little lake may be a thousand feet deep," I said. "In 1903 Professor Farrago, of Bronx Park, measured a lake in the Thunder Mountains, which was two thousand seven hundred and sixty-nine feet deep."

Miss White looked at me curiously.

Into a patch of late sunshine flitted a small butterfly—one of the *Grapta* species. It settled on a chip of wood, uncoiled its delicate proboscis, and spread its fulvous and deeply indented wings.

"Grapta california," remarked Brown to me.

"Vanessa asteriska," I corrected him. "Note the anal angle of the secondaries and the argentiferous discal area bordering the subcostal nervule."

"The characteristic stripes on the primaries are wanting," he demurred.

"It is double brooded. The summer form lacks the three darker bands."

A few moments' silence was broken by the voice of Miss White.

"I had no idea," she remarked, "that Alaskan guides were so familiar with entomological terms and nomenclature."

We both turned very red.

Brown mumbled something about having picked up a smattering. I added that Brown had taught me.

Perhaps she believed us; her blue eyes rested on us curiously, musingly. Also, at moments, I fancied there was the faintest glint of amusement in them.

She said:

"Two scientific gentlemen from New York requested permission to join this expedition, but Mrs. Batt refused them." She gazed thoughtfully upon the waters of Lake Gladys Doolittle Batt. "I wonder," she murmured, "what became of those two gentlemen."

It was evident that we had betrayed ourselves to this young girl.

She glanced at us again, and perhaps she noted in our fascinated gaze an expression akin to terror, for suddenly she laughed—such a clear, sweet, silvery little laugh!

"For my part," she said, "I wish they had come with us. I like—men."

With that she bade us goodnight very politely and went off to her tent, leaving us with our hats pressed against our stomachs, attempting by the profundity of our bows to indicate the depth of our gratitude.

"There's a girl!" exclaimed Brown, as soon as she had disappeared behind her tent flaps. "She'll never let on to Medusa, Xantippe, Cassandra and Company. I *like* that girl, Smith."

"You're not the only one imbued by such sentiments," said I.

He smiled a fatuous and reminiscent smile. He certainly was good-looking. Presently he said:

"She has the most delightful way of gazing at a man—"

"I've noticed," I said pleasantly.

"Oh. Did she happen to glance at *you* that way?" he inquired. I wanted to beat him.

All I said was:

"She's certainly some kitten." Which bottled that young man for a while.

We lay on the bank of the tiny lake, our backs against a huge pine-tree, watching the last traces of colour fading from peak and tree-top.

"Isn't it queer," I said, "that not a trout has splashed? It can't be that there are no fish in the lake."

"There *are* such lakes."

Yes, very deep ones. I wonder how deep this is."

"We'll be out at sunrise with our reel of piano wire and take soundings," he said. "The heavy artillery won't wake until they're ready to be loaded with flap-jacks."

I shuddered:

"They're fearsome creatures, Brown. Somehow, that resolute and bony one has inspired me with a terror unutterable."

"Mrs. Batt?"

"Yes."

He said seriously:

"She'll make a horrid outcry when she asks for her knitting. What are you going to tell her?"

"I shall say that Indians ambuscaded us while she was asleep, and carried off all those things."

"You lie very nicely, don't you?" he remarked admiringly.

"*In vitium ducit culpæ fuga*," said I. "Besides, they don't really need those articles."

He laughed. He didn't seem to be very much afraid of Mrs. Batt.

It had grown deliciously dusky, and myriads of stars were coming out. Little by little the lake lost its shape in the darkness, until only an irregular, star-set area of quiet water indicated that there was any lake there at all.

I remember that Brown and I, reclining at the foot of the tree, were looking at the still and starry surface of the lake, over which numbers of bats were darting after insects; and I recollect that I was just about to speak, when, of a sudden, the silent and luminous surface of the water was shattered as with a subterranean explosion; a geyser of scintillating spray shot upward flashing, foaming, towering a hundred feet into the air. And through it I seemed to catch a glimpse of a vast, quivering, twisting mass of silver falling back with a crash into the lake, while the huge fountain rained spray on every side and the little lake rocked and heaved from shore to shore, sending great sheets of surf up over the rocks so high that the very tree-tops dripped.

Petrified, dumb, our senses almost paralyzed by the shock, our ears still deafened by the watery crash of that gigantic something that had fallen into the lake, and our eyes starting from their sockets, we stared at the darkness.

Slap—slash—slush went the waves, hitting the shore with a clashing sound almost metallic. Vision and hearing told us that the water in the lake was rocking like the contents of a bath-tub.

"G-g-good Lord!" whispered Brown. "Is there a v-volcano under that lake?"

"Did you see that huge, glittering shape that seemed to fall into the water?" I gasped.

"Yes. What was it? A meteor?"

"No. It was something that first came out of the lake and fell back—the way a trout leaps. Heavens! It couldn't have been alive, could it?"

"W-wh-what do you mean?" stammered Brown.

"It couldn't have been a f-f-fish, could it?" I asked with chattering teeth.

"No! *No!* It was as big as a Pullman car! It must have been a falling star. Did you ever hear of a fish as big as a sleeping car?"

I was too thoroughly unnerved to reply. The roaring of the surf had subsided somewhat, enough for another sound to reach our ears—a raucous, gallinaceous, squawking sound.

I sprang up and looked at the row of tents. White-robed figures loomed in front of them. The heavy artillery was evidently frightened.

We went over to them, and when we got nearer they chastely scuttled into their tents and thrust out a row of heads—heads hideous with curl-papers.

"What was that awful noise? An earthquake?" shrilled the Reverend Dr. Jones. "I think I'll go home."

"Was it an avalanche?" demanded Mrs. Batt, in a deep and shaky voice. "Are we in any immediate danger, young man?"

I said that it was probably a flying-star which had happened to strike the lake and explode.

"What an awful region!" wailed Miss Dingleheimer. "I've had my money's worth. I wish to go back to New York at once. I'll begin to dress immediately—"

"It might be a million years before another meteor falls in this latitude," I said, soothingly.

"Or it might be ten minutes," sobbed Miss Dingleheimer. "What do *you* know about it, anyway! I want to go home. I'm putting on my stockings now. I'm getting dressed as fast as I can—"

Her voice was blotted out in a mighty crash from the lake. Appalled, I whirled on my heel, just in time to see another huge jet of water rise high in the starlight, another, another, until the entire lake was but a cluster of gigantic geysers exploding a hundred feet in the air, while through them, falling back into the smother of furious foam, great silvery bulks dropped crashing, one after another.

I don't know how long the incredible vision lasted; the woods roared with the infernal pandemonium, echoed and re-echoed from mountain to mountain; the tree-tops fairly stormed spray, driving it in sheets through the leaves; and the shores of the lake spouted surf long after the last vast, silvery shape had fallen back again into the water.

As my senses gradually recovered, I found myself supporting Mrs. Batt on one arm and the Reverend Dr. Jones upon my bosom. Both had fainted. I released them with a shudder and turned to look for Brown.

Somebody had swooned in his arms, too.

He was not noticing me, and as I approached him I heard him say something resembling the word "kitten."

In spite of my demoralization, another fear seized me, and I drew nearer and peered closely at what he was holding so nobly in his arms. It was, as I supposed, Angelica White.

I don't know whether my arrival occultly revived her, for as I stumbled over a tent-peg she opened her blue eyes, and then disengaged herself from Brown's arms.

"Oh, I am *so* frightened," she murmured. She looked at me sideways when she said it.

"Come," said I coldly to Brown, "let Miss White retire and lie down. This meteoric shower is over and so is the danger."

He evinced a desire to further soothe and minister to Miss White, but she said, with considerable composure, that she was feeling better; and Brown came unwillingly with me to inspect the heavy artillery lines.

That formidable battery was wrecked, the pieces dismounted and lying tumbled about in their emplacements.

But a vigorous course of cold water in dippers revived them, and we herded them into one tent and quieted them with some soothing prevarication, the details of which I have forgotten; but it was something about a flock of meteors which hit the earth every twelve billion years, and that it was now all over for another such interim, and everybody could sleep soundly with the consciousness of having assisted at a spectacle never before beheld except by a primordial protoplasmic cell.

Which flattered them, I think, for, seated once more at the base of our tree, presently we heard weird noises from the reconcentrados, like the moaning of the harbour bar.

They slept, the heavy guns, like unawakened engines of destruction all a-row in battery. But Brown and I, fearfully excited, still dazed and bewildered, sat with our fascinated eyes fixed on the lake, asking each other what in the name of miracles it was that we had witnessed and heard.

On one thing we were agreed. A scientific discovery of the most enormous importance awaited our investigation.

This was no time for temporising, for deception, for any species of polite shilly-shallying. We must, on the morrow, tear off our masks and appear before these misguided and feminine victims of our duplicity in our own characters as scientists. We must boldly avow our identities and flatly refuse to stir from this spot until the mystery of this astounding lake had been thoroughly investigated.

And so, discussing our policy, our plans for the morrow, and mutually reassuring each other concerning our common ability to successfully defy the heavy artillery, we finally fell asleep.

III

Dawn awoke me, and I sat up in my blanket and aroused Brown.

No birds were singing. It seemed unusual, and I spoke of it to Brown. Never have I witnessed such a still, strange daybreak. Mountains, woods, and water were curiously silent. There was not a sound to be heard, nothing stirred except the thin veil of vapour over the water, shreds of which were now parting from the shore and steaming slowly upward.

There was, it seemed to me, something slightly uncanny about this lake, even in repose. The water seemed as translucent as a dark crystal, and as motionless as the surface of a mirror. Nothing stirred its placid surface, not a ripple, not an insect, not a leaf floating.

Brown had lugged the pneumatic raft down to the shore where he was now pumping it full: I followed with the paddles, pole, and hydroscope. When the raft had been pumped up and was afloat, we carried the reel of gossamer piano-wire aboard, followed it, pushed off, and paddled quietly through the level cobwebs of mist toward the centre of the lake. From the shore I heard a gruesome noise. It originated under one of the row of tents of the heavy artillery. Medusa, snoring, was an awesome sound in that wilderness and solitude of dawn.

I was unscrewing the centre-plug from the raft and screwing into the empty socket the lens of the hydroscope and attaching the battery, while Brown started his sounding; and I was still busy when an exclamation from my companion started me:

"We're breaking some records! Do you know it, Smith?"

"Where is the lead?"

"Three hundred fathoms and still running!"

"Nonsense!"

"Look at it yourself! It goes on unreeling: I've put the drag on. Hurry and adjust the hydroscope!"

I sighted the powerful instrument for two thousand feet, altering it from minute to minute as Brown excitedly announced the amazing depth of the lake. When he called out four thousand feet, I stared at him.

"There's something wrong—" I began.

"There's *nothing* wrong!" he interrupted. "Four thousand five hundred! Five thousand! Five thousand five hundred—"

"Are you squatting there and trying to tell me that this lake is over a mile deep!"

"Look for yourself!" he said in an unsteady voice. "Here is the tape! You can read, can't you? Six thousand feet—and running evenly. Six thousand five hundred! . . . Seven thousand! Seven thousand five—"

"It *can't* be!" I protested.

But it was true. Astounded, I continued to adjust the hydroscope to a range incredible, turning the screw to focus at a mile and a half, at two miles, at two and a quarter, a half, three-quarters, three miles, three miles and a quarter—click!

"Good Heavens!" he whispered. "This lake is three miles and a quarter deep!"

Mechanically I set the lachet, screwed the hood firm, drew out the black eye-mask, locked it, then, kneeling on the raft I rested my face in the mask, felt for the lever, and switched on the electric light.

Quicker that thought the solid lance of dazzling light plunged down through profundity, and the vast abyss of water was revealed along its pathway.

Nothing moved in those tremendous depths except, nearly two miles below, a few spots of tinsel glittered and drifted like flakes of mica.

At first I scarcely noticed them, supposing them to be vast beds of silvery bottom sand glittering under the electric pencil of the hydroscope. But presently it occurred to me that these brilliant specks in motion were not on the bottom—were a little less than two miles deep, and therefore suspended.

To be seen at all, at two miles' depth, whatever they were they must have considerable bulk.

"Do you see anything?" demanded Brown.

"Some silvery specks at a depth of two miles."

"What do they look like?"

"Specks."

"Are they in motion?"

"They seem to be."

"Do they come any nearer?"

After a while I answered:

"One of the specks seems to be growing larger. . . . I believe it is in motion and is floating slowly upward. . . . It's certainly getting bigger. . . . It's getting longer."

"Is it a fish?"

"It can't be."

"Why not?"

"It's impossible. Fish don't attain the size of whales in mountain ponds."

There was a silence. After an interval I said:

"Brown, I don't know what to make of that thing."

"Is it coming any nearer?"

"Yes."

"What does it look like now?"

"It *looks* like a fish. But it can't be. It looks like a tiny, silver minnow. But it can't be. Why, if it resembles a minnow in size at this distance—what can be its actual dimensions?"

"Let me look," he said.

Unwillingly I raised my head from the mask and yielded him my place.

A long silence followed. The western mountaintops reddened under the rising sun; the sky grew faintly bluer. Yet, there was not a bird-note in that still place, not a flash of wings, nothing stirring.

Here and there along the lake shore I noticed unusual-looking trees—very odd-looking trees indeed, for their trunks seemed bleached and dead, and as though no bark covered them, yet every stark limb was covered with foliage—a thick foliage so dark in colour that it seemed black to me.

I glanced at my motionless companion where he knelt with his face in the mask, then I unslung my field-glasses and focussed them on the nearest of the curious trees.

At first I could not make out what I was looking at; then, to my astonishment, I saw that these stark, gray trees were indeed lifeless, and that what I had mistaken for dark foliage were velvety clusters of bats hanging there asleep—thousands of them thickly infesting and clotting the dead branches with a sombre and horrid effect of foliage.

I don't mind bats in ordinary numbers. But in such soft, motionless masses they slightly sickened me. There must have been literally tons of them hanging to the dead trees.

"This is pleasant," I said. "Look at those bats, Brown."

When Brown spoke without lifting his head, his voice was so shaken, so altered, that the mere sound of it scared me:

"Smith," he said, "there is a fish in here, shaped exactly like a brook minnow. And I should judge, by the depth it is swimming in, that it is about as long as an ordinary Pullman car."

His voice shook, but his words were calm to the point of commonplace. Which made the effect of his statement all the more terrific.

"A—a *minnow*—as big as a Pullman car?" I repeated, dazed.

"Larger, I think. . . . It looks to me through the hydroscope, at this distance, exactly like a tiny, silvery minnow. It's half a mile down. . . . Swimming about. . . . I can see its eyes; they must be about ten feet in diameter. I can see its fins moving. And there are about a dozen others, much deeper, swimming around. . . . This is easily the most overwhelming contribution made to science since the discovery of the purple-spotted dingle-bock, *Bukkus dinglii*. . . . We've got to catch one of those gigantic fish!"

"How?" I gasped. "How are we going to catch a minnow as large as a sleeping car?"

"I don't know, but we've got to do it. We've got to manage it, somehow."

"It would require a steel cable to hold such a fish and a donkey engine to reel him in! And what about a hook? And if we had hook, line, steam-winch, and everything else, *what* about bait?"

He knelt for some time longer, watching the fish, before he resigned the hydroscope to me. Then I watched it; but it came no nearer, seeming contented to swim about at the depth of a little more than half a mile. Deep under this fish I could see others glittering as they sailed or darted to and fro.

Presently I raised my head and sat thinking. The sun now gilded the water; a little breeze ruffled it here and there where dainty cast's-paws played over the surface.

"What on earth do you suppose those gigantic fish feed on?" asked Brown under his breath.

I thought a moment longer, then it came to me in a flash of understanding, and I pointed at the dead trees.

"Bats!" I muttered. "They feed on bats as other fish feed on the little, gauzy-winged flies which dance over ponds! You saw those bats flying over the pond last night, didn't you? That explains the whole thing! Don't you understand? Why, what we saw were these gigantic fish leaping like trout after the bats. It was their feeding time!"

I do not imagine that two more excited scientists ever existed than Brown and I. The joy of discovery transfigured us. Here we had discovered a lake in the Thunder Mountains which was the deepest lake in the world; and it was inhabited by a few gigantic fish of the minnow species, the existence of which, hitherto, had never even been dreamed of by science.

"Kitten," I said, my voice broken by emotion, "which will you have named after you, the lake or the fish? Shall it be Lake Kitten Brown, or shall it be *Minnius kittenii?* Speak!"

"What about that old party whose name you said had already been given to the lake?" he asked piteously.

"Who? Mrs. Batt? Do you think I'd name such an important lake after *her?* Anyway, she has declined the honour."

"Very well," he said, "I'll accept it. And the fish shall be known as *Minnius Smithii!*"

Too deeply moved to speak, we bent over and shook hands with each other. In that solemn and holy moment, surcharged with ecstatic emotion, a deep, distant reverberation came across the water to our ears. It was the heavy artillery, snoring.

Never can I forget that scene; sunshine glittering on the pond, the silent forests and towering peaks, the blue sky overhead, the dead trees where thousands of bats hung in nauseating clusters, thicker than the leaves in Valembrosa—and Kitten Brown and I, cross-legged upon our pneumatic raft, hands clasped in pledge of deathless devotion to science and a fraternity unending.

"And how about that girl?" he asked.

"What girl?"

"Angelica White?"

"Well," said I, *"what* about her?"

"Does she go with the lake or with the fish?"

"What do you mean?" I asked coldly, withdrawing my hand from his clasp.

"I mean, which of us gets the first chance to win her?" he said, blushing. "There's no use denying that we both have been bowled over by her; is there?"

I pondered for several moments.

"She is an extremely intelligent girl," I said, stalling.

"Yes, and then some."

After a few minutes' further thought, I said:

"Possibly I am in error, but at moments it has seemed to me that my marked attentions to Miss White are not wholly displeasing to her. I may be mistaken—"

"I think you are, Smith."

"Why?"

"Because—well, because I seem to think so."

I said coldly:

"Because she happened to faint away in your arms last night is no symptom that she prefers you. Is it?"

"No."

"Then why do you seem to think that tactful, delicate, and assiduous attentions on my part may prove not entirely unwelcome to this unusually intelligent—"

"Smith!"

"What?"

"Miss White is not only a trained nurse, but she also is about to receive her diploma as a physician."

"How do you know?"

"She told me."

"When?"

"When you were building the fire last night. Also, she informed me that she had relentlessly dedicated herself to a eugenic marriage."

"When did she tell you *that?"*

"While you were bringing in a bucket of water from the lake last night. And furthermore, she told me that *I* was perfectly suited for a eugenic marriage."

"When did she tell you *that?"* I demanded.

"When she had—fainted—in my arms."

"How the devil did she come to say a thing like that?"

He became conspicuously red about the ears:

"Well, I had just told her that I had fallen in love with her—"

"Damn!" I said. And that's all I said; and seizing a paddle I made furiously for shore. Behind me I heard the whirr of the piano wire as Brown started the electric reel. Later I heard him clamping the hood on the hydroscope; but I was too disgusted for any further words, and I dug away at the water with my paddle.

In various and weird stages of morning déshabillé the heavy artillery came down to the shore for morning ablutions, all a-row like a file of ducks.

They glared at me as I leaped ashore:

"I want my breakfast!" snapped Mrs. Batt. "Do you hear what I say, guide? And I don't wish to be kept waiting for it either! I desire to get out of this place as soon as possible."

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I intend to stay here for some time."

"What!" bawled the heavy artillery in booming unison.

But my temper had been sorely tried, and I was in a mood to tell the truth and make short work of it, too.

"Ladies," I said, "I'll not mince matters. Mr. Brown and I are not guides; we are scientists from Bronx Park, and we don't know a bally thing about this wilderness we're in!"

"Swindler!" shouted Mrs. Batt, in an enraged voice. "I knew very well that the United States Government would never have named that puddle of water after *me!"*

"Don't worry, madam! I've named it after Mr. Brown. And the new species of gigantic fish which I discovered in this lake I have named after myself. As for leaving this spot until I have concluded my scientific study of these fish, I simply won't. I intend to observe their habits and to capture one of them if it requires the remainder of my natural life to do so. I shall be sorry to detain you here during such a period, but it can't be helped. And now you know what the situation is, and you are at liberty to think it over after you have washed your countenances in Lake Kitten Brown."

Rage possessed the heavy artillery, and a fury indescribable seized them when they discovered that Indians had raided their half ton of feminine perquisites. I went up a tree.

When the tumult had calmed sufficiently for them to distinguish what I said, I made a speech to them. From the higher branches of a neighboring tree Kitten Brown applauded and cried, "Hear! Hear!"

"Ladies," I said, "you know the worst, now. If you keep me up this tree and starve me to death it will be murder. Also, you don't know enough to get out of these forests, but I can guide you back the way you came. I'll do it if you cease your dangerous demonstrations and permit Mr. Brown and myself to remain here and study these giant fish for a week or two."

They now seemed disposed to consider the idea. There was nothing else for them to do. So after an hour or two, Brown and I ventured to descend from our trees, and we went among them to placate them and ingratiate ourselves as best we might.

"Think," I argued, "what a matchless opportunity for you to be among the first discoverers of a totally new and undescribed species of giant fish! Think what a legacy it will be to leave such a record to posterity! Think how proud and happy your descendants will be to know that their ancestors assisted at the discovery of *Minnius Smithii!*"

"Why can't they be named after *me?"* demanded Mrs. Batt.

"Because," I explained patiently, "they have already been named after *me!"*

"Couldn't *something* be named after me?" inquired the fearsome lady.

"The bats," suggested Brown politely, "we could name a bat after you with pleasure—"

I thought for a moment she meant to swing on him. He thought so, too, and ducked.

"A bat!" she shouted. "Name a *bat* after *me!"*

"Many a celebrated scientist has been honoured by having his name conferred upon humbler fauna," I explained.

But she remained dangerous, so I went and built the fire, and squatted there, frying bacon, while on the other side of the fire, sitting side by side, Kitten Brown and Angelica White gazed upon each other with enraptured eyes. It was slightly sickening—but let that pass. I was beginning to understand that science is a jealous mistress and that any contemplated infidelity of mine stood every chance of being squelched. No; evidently I had not been fashioned for the joys of legal domesticity. Science, the wanton jade, had not yet finished her dance with me. Apparently my maxixe with her was to be eternal. *Fides servanda est.*

* * *

That afternoon the heavy artillery held a council of war, and evidently came to a conclusion to make the best of the situation, for toward sundown they accosted me with a request for the raft, explaining that they desired to picnic aboard and afterward row about the lake and indulge in song.

So Brown and I put aboard the craft a substantial cold supper; and the heavy artillery embarked, taking aboard a guitar to be worked by Miss Dingleheimer, and knitting for the others.

It was a lovely evening. Brown and I had been discussing a plan to dynamite the lake and stun the fish, that method appealing to us as the only possible way to secure a specimen of the stupendous minnows which inhabited the depths. In fact, it was our only hope of possessing one of these creatures—fishing with a donkey engine, steel cable, and a hook baited with a bat being too uncertain and far more laborious and expensive.

I was still smoking my pipe, seated at the foot of the big pine-tree, watching the water turn from gold to pink: Brown sat higher up the slope, his arm around Angelica White. I carefully kept my back toward them.

On the lake the heavy artillery were revelling loudly, banqueting, singing, strumming the guitar, and trailing their hands overboard across the sunset-tinted water.

I was thinking of nothing in particular as I now remember, except that I noticed the bats beginning to flit over the lake; when Brown called to me from the slope above, asking whether it was perfectly safe for the heavy artillery to remain out so late.

"Why?" I demanded.

"Suppose," he shouted, "that those fish should begin to jump and feed on the bats again?"

I had never thought of that.

I rose and hurried nervously down to the shore, and, making a megaphone of my hands, I shouted:

"Come in! It isn't safe to remain out any longer!"

Scornful laughter from the artillery answered my appeal.

"You'd better come in!" I called "You can't tell what might happen if any of those fish should jump."

"Mind your business!" retorted Mrs. Batt. "We've had enough of your prevarications—"

Then, suddenly, without the faintest shadow of warning, from the centre of the lake a vast geyser of water towered a hundred feet in the air.

For one dreadful second I saw the raft hurled skyward, balanced on the crest of the stupendous fountain, spilling ladies, supper, guitars, and knitting in every direction.

Then a horrible thing occurred; fish after fish shot up out of the storm of water and foam, seizing, as they fell, ladies, luncheon, and knitting in mid-air, falling back with a crashing shock which seemed to rock the very mountains.

"Help!" I screamed. And fainted dead away.

* * *

Is it necessary to proceed? Literature nods; Science shakes her head. No, nothing but literature lies beyond the ripples which splashed musically upon the shore, terminating forever the last vibration from that immeasurable catastrophe.

Why should I go on? The newspapers of the nation have recorded the last scenes of the tragedy.

We know that tons of dynamite are being forwarded to that solitary lake. We know that it is the determination of the Government to rid the world of those gigantic minnows.

And yet, somehow, it seems to me as I sit writing here in my office, amid the verdure of Bronx Park, that the destruction of these enormous fish is a mistake.

What more splendid sarcophagus could the ladies of the lake desire than these huge, silvery, itinerant and living tombs?

What reward more sumptuous could anybody wish for than to rest at last within the interior dimness of an absolutely new species of anything?

For me, such a final repose as this would represent the highest pinnacle of sublimity, the uttermost zenith of mortal dignity.

* * *

So what more is there for me to say?

As for Angelica—but no matter. I hope she may be comparatively happy with Kitten Brown. Yet, as I have said before, handsome men never last. But she should have thought of that in time.

I absolve myself of all responsibility. She had her chance. ❋

One Over

I

Professor Farrago had remarked to me that morning:

"The city of New York always reminds me of a slovenly, fat woman with her dress unbuttoned behind."

I nodded.

"New York's architecture," said I, "—or what popularly passes for it—is all in front. The minute you get to the rear a pitiable condition is exposed."

He said: "Professor Jane Bottomly is all façade; the remainder of her is merely an occiputal backyard full of theoretical tin cans and broken bottles. I think we all had better resign."

It was a fearsome description. I trembled as I lighted an inexpensive cigar.

The sentimental feminist movement in America was clearly at the bottom of the Bottomly affair.

Long ago, in a reactionary burst of hysteria, the North enfranchised the Ethiopian. In a similar sentimental explosion of dementia, some sixty years later, the United States wept violently over the immemorial wrongs perpetrated upon the restless sex, opened the front and back doors of opportunity, and sobbed out, "Go to it, ladies!"

They are still going.

Professor Jane Bottomly was wished on us out of a pleasant April sky. She fell like a meteoric mass of molten metal upon the Bronx Park Zoölogical Society splashing her excoriating personality over everybody until everybody writhed.

I had not yet seen the lady. I did not care to. Sooner or later I'd be obliged to meet her but I was not impatient.

Now the Field Expeditionary Force of the Bronx Park Zoölogical Society is, perhaps, the most important arm of the service. Professor Bottomly had just been appointed official head of all field work. Why? Nobody knew. It is true that she had written several combination nature and love romances. In these popular volumes trees, flowers, butterflies, birds, animals, dialect, sobs, and sunbonnets were stirred up together into a saccharine mess eagerly gulped down by a provincial reading public, which immediately protruded its tongue for more.

The news of her impending arrival among us was an awful blow to everybody at the Bronx. Professor Farrago fainted in the arms of his pretty stenographer; Professor Cornelius Lezard of the Batrachian Department ran around his desk all day long in narrowing circles and was discovered on his stomach still feebly squirming like an expiring top; Dr. Hans Fooss, our beloved Professor of Pachydermatology, sat for hours weeping into his noodle soup. As for me, I was both furious and frightened, for, within the hearing of several people, Professor Bottomly had remarked in a very clear voice to her new assistant, Dr. Daisy Delmour, that she intended to get rid of me for the good of the Bronx because of my reputation for indiscreet gallantry among the feminine employees of the Bronx Society.

Professor Lezard overhead that outrageous remark and he hastened to repeat it to me.

I was lunching at the time in my private office in the Administration Building with Dr. Hans Fooss—he and I being too busy dissecting an unusually fine specimen of Dingue to go to the Rolling Stone Inn for luncheon—when Professor Lezard rushed in with the scandalous libel still sizzling in his ears.

"Everybody heard her say it!" he went on, wringing his hands. "It was a most unfortunate thing for anybody to say about you before all those young ladies. Every stenographer and typewriter there turned pale and then red."

"What!" I exclaimed, conscious that my own ears were growing large and hot. "Did that outrageous woman have the bad taste to say such a thing before all those sensitive girls!"

"She did. She glared at them when she said it. Several blondes and one brunette began to cry."

"I hope," said I, a trifle tremulously, "that no typewriter so far forgot herself as to admit noticing playfulness on my part."

"They all were tearfully unanimous in declaring you to be a perfect gentleman!"

"I am," I said. "I am also a married man—irrevocably wedded to science. I desire no other spouse. I am ineligible; and everybody knows it. If at times a purely scientific curiosity leads me into a detached and impersonally psychological investigation of certain—ah—feminine idiosyncrasies—"

"Certainly," said Lezard. "To investigate the feminine is more than a science; it is a duty!"

"Of a surety!" nodded Dr. Fooss.

I looked proudly upon my two loyal friends and bit into my cheese sandwich. Only men know men. A jury of my peers had exonerated me. What did I care for Professor Bottomly!

"All the same," added Lezard, "you'd better be careful or Professor Bottomly will put one over on you yet."

"I am always careful," I said with dignity.

"All men should be. It is the only protection of a defenseless coast line," nodded Lezard.

"Und neffer, neffer commid nodding to paper," added Dr. Fooss. "Don'd neffer write it, 'I lofe you like I was going to blow up alretty!' Ach, nein! Don'd you write down somedings. Effery man he iss entitled to protection; und so iss it he iss protected."

Stein in hand he beamed upon us benevolently over his knifeful of sauerfisch, then he fed himself and rammed it down with a hearty draught of Pilsner. We gazed with reverence upon Kultur as embodied in this great Teuton.

"That woman," remarked Lezard to me, "certainly means to get rid of you. It seems to me that there are only two possible ways for you to hold down your job at the Bronx. You know it, don't you?"

I nodded. "Yes," I said; "either I must pay marked masculine attention to Professor Bottomly or I must manage to put one over on her."

"Of course," said Lezard, "the first method is the easier for *you*—"

"Not for a minute!" I said, hastily; "I simply couldn't become frolicsome with her. You say she's got a voice like a drill-sergeant and she goose-steps when she walks; and I don't mind admitting she has me badly scared already. No; she must be scientifically ruined. It is the only method which makes her elimination certain."

"But if her popular nature books didn't ruin her scientifically, how can we hope to lead her astray?" inquired Lezard.

"There is," I said, thoughtfully, "only one thing that can really ruin a scientist. Ridicule! I have braved it many a time, taking my scientific life in my hands in pursuit of unknown specimens which might have proved only imaginary. Public ridicule would have ended my scientific career in such an event. I know of no better way to end Professor Bottomly's scientific career and capability for mischief than to start her out after something which doesn't exist, inform the newspapers, and let her suffer the agonising consequences."

Dr. Fooss began to shout:

"The idea iss schön! colossal! prachtvol! ausgezeichnet! wunderbar! wunderschön! gemütlich—" A large, tough noodle checked him. While he labored with Teutonic imperturbability to master it Lezard and I exchanged suggestions regarding the proposed annihilation of this fearsome woman who had come ravening among us amid the peaceful and soporific environment of Bronx Park.

It was a dreadful thing for us to have our balmy Lotus-eaters' paradise so startlingly invaded by a large, loquacious, loud-voiced lady who had already stirred us all out of our agreeable, traditional and leisurely inertia. Inertia begets cogitation, and cogitation begets ideas, and ideas beget reflexion, and profound reflexion is the fundamental cornerstone of that immortal temple in which the goddess Science sits asleep between her dozing sisters, Custom and Religion.

This thought seemed to me so unusually beautiful that I wrote it with a pencil upon my cuff.

While I was writing it, quietly happy in the deep pleasure that my intellectual allegory afforded me, Dr. Fooss swabbed the last morsel of nourishment from his plate with a wad of rye bread, then bolting the bread and wiping his beard with his fingers and his fingers on his waistcoat, he made several guttural observations too profoundly German to be immediately intelligible, and lighted his porcelain pipe.

"Ach wass!" he remarked in ruminative fashion. "Dot Frauenzimmer she iss to raise hell alretty determined. Von Pachydermatology she knows nodding. Maybe she leaves me alone, maybe it is to be 'raus mit me. I' weis' ni'! It iss aber besser one over on dat lady to put, yess?"

"It certainly is advisable," replied Lezard.

"Let us try to think of something sufficiently disastrous to terminate her scientific career," said I. And I bowed my rather striking head and rested the point of my forefinger upon my forehead. Thought crystallises more quickly for me when I assume this attitude.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Lezard fold his arms and sit frowning at infinity.

Dr. Fooss lay back in a big, deeply padded armchair and closed his prominent eyes. His pipe went out presently, and now and then he made long-drawn nasal remarks, in German, too complicated for either Lezard or for me to entirely comprehend.

"We must try to get her as far away from here as possible," mused Lezard. "Is Oyster Bay *too* far and too cruel?"

I pondered darkly upon the suggestion. But it seemed unpleasantly like murder.

"Lezard," said I, "come, let us reason together. Now *what* is woman's besetting emotion?"

"Curiosity?"

"Very well; assuming that to be true, what—ah—quality particularly characterizes woman when so beset."

"Ruthless determination."

"Then," said I, "we ought to begin my exciting the curiosity of Professor Bottomly; and her ruthless determination to satisfy that curiosity should logically follow."

"How," he asked, "are we to arouse her curiosity?"

"By pretending that we have knowledge of something hitherto undiscovered, the discovery of which would redound to our scientific glory."

"I see. She'd want the glory for herself. She'd swipe it."

"She would,"said I.

"Tee—hee!" he giggled; "Wouldn't it be funny to plant something phony on her—"

I waved my arms rather gracefully in my excitement:

"That is the germ of an idea!" I said. "If we could plant something—something—far away from here—very far away—if we could bury something—like the Cardiff Giant—"

"Hundreds and hundreds of miles away!"

"Thousands!" I insisted, enthusiastically.

"Tee-hee! In Tasmania, for example! Maybe a Tasmanian Devil might acquire her!"

"There exists a gnat," said I, "in Borneo—*Gnatus soporificus*—and when this tiny gnat stings people they never entirely wake up. It's really rather a pleasurable catastrophe, I understand. Life becomes one endless cat-nap—one delightful siesta, with intervals for light nourishment. . . . She—ah—could sit very comfortably in some pleasant retreat and rock in a rocking-chair and doze quite happily through the years to come. . . . And from your description of her I should say that the Soldiers' Home might receive her."

"It won't do," he said, gloomily.

"Why? Is it too much like crime?"

"Oh not at all. Only if she went to Borneo she'd be sure to take a mosquito-bar with her."

In the depressed silence which ensued Dr. Fooss suddenly made several Futurist observations through his nose with monotonous but authoritative regularity. I tried to catch his meaning and his eye. The one remained cryptic, the other shut.

Lezard sat thinking very hard. And as I fidgeted in my chair, fiddling nervously with various objects lying on my desk I chanced to pick up a letter from the pile of still unopened mail at my elbow.

Still pondering on Professor Bottomly's proposed destruction, I turned the letter over idly and my preoccupied gaze rested on the postmark. After a moment I leaned forward and examined it more attentively. The letter directed to me was postmarked Fort Carcajou, Cook's Peninsula, Baffin Land; and now I recalled the handwriting, having already seen it three or four times within the last month or so.

"Lezard," I said, "that lunatic trapper from Baffin Land has written to me again. What do you suppose is the matter with him? Is he just plain crazy or does he think he can be funny with me?"

Lezard gazed at me absently. Then, all at once a gleam of savage interest lighted his somewhat solemn features.

"Read the letter to me," he said, with an evil smile which instantly animated my own latent imagination. And immediately it occurred to me that perhaps, in the humble letter from the wilds of Baffin Land, which I was now opening with eager and unsteady fingers, might lie concealed the professional undoing of Professor Jane Bottomly, and the only hope of my own ultimate and scientific salvation.

The room became hideously still as I unfolded the pencil-scrawled sheets of cheap, ruled letter paper.

Dr. Fooss opened his eyes, looked at me, made porcine sounds indicative of personal well-being, relighted his pipe, and disposed himself to listen. But just as I was about to begin, Lezard suddenly laid his forefinger across his lips conjuring us to densest silence.

For a moment or two I heard nothing except the buzzing of flies. Then I stole a startled glance at my door. It was opening slowly, almost imperceptibly.

But it did not open very far—just a crack remained. Then, listening with all our might, we heard the cautiously suppressed breathing of somebody in the hallway just outside of my door.

Lezard turned and cast at me a glance of horrified intelligence. In dumb pantomime he outlined in the air, with one hand, the large and feminine amplification of his own person, conveying to us the certainty of his suspicions concerning the unseen eavesdropper.

We nodded. We understood perfectly that *she* was out there prepared to listen to every word we uttered.

A flicker of ferocious joy disturbed Lezard's otherwise innocuous features; he winked horribly at Dr. Fooss and at me, and uttered a faint click with his teeth and tongue like the snap of a closing trap.

"Gentlemen," he said, in the guarded yet excited voice of a man who is confident of not being overheard, "the matter under discussion admits of only one interpretation: a discovery—perhaps the most vitally important discovery of all the centuries—is imminent.

"Secrecy is imperative; the scientific glory is to be shared by us alone, and there is enough of glory to go around.

"Mr. Chairman, I move that epoch-making letter be read aloud!"

"I second dot motion!" said Dr. Fooss, winking so violently at me that his glasses wabbled.

"Gentlemen," said I, "it has been moved and seconded that this epoch-making letter be read aloud. All those in favor will kindly say 'aye.'"

"Aye! Aye!" they exclaimed, fairly wriggling in their furtive joy.

"The contrary-minded will kindly emit the usual negation," I went on. . . . "It seems to be carried. . . . It *is* carried. The chairman will proceed to the reading of the epoch-making letter."

I quietly lighted a five-cent cigar, unfolded the letter and read aloud:

"Joneses Shack,
Golden Glacier,
Cook's Peninsula, Baffin Land,
March 15, 1915.

"Professor, Dear Sir:

"I already wrote you three times no answer having been rec'd perhaps you think I'm kiddin' you're a dam' liar I ain't.

"Hoping to tempt you to come I will hereby tell you more'n I told you in my other letters, the terminal moraine of this here Golden Glacier finishes into a marsh, nothing to see for miles excep' frozen tussock and mud and all flat as hell for fifty miles which is where I am trappin' it for mink and otter and now ready to go back to Fort Carcajou. i told you what I seen stickin' in under this here marsh, where anything sticks out the wolves have eat it, but most of them there ellerphants is in under the ice and mud too far for the wolves to git 'em.

"i ain't kiddin' you, there is a whole herd of furry ellerphants in the marsh like as they were stuck there and all lay down and was drownded like. Some has tusks and some hasn't. Two ellerphants stuck out of the ice, I eat onto one, the meat was good and sweet and joosy, the damn wolves eat it up that night, I had cut stakes and rost for three months though and am eating off it yet.

"Thinking as how ellerphants and all like that is your graft, I being a keeper in the Mouse House once in the Bronx and seein' you nosin' around like you was full of scientific thinks, it comes to me to write you and put you next.

"If you say so I'll wait here and help you with them ellerphants. Livin' wages is all I ask also eleven thousand dollars for tippin' you wise. I won't tell nobody till I hear from you. I'm hones' you can trus' me. Write me to Fort Carcajou if you mean bizness. So no more respectfully,

JAMES SKAW."

When I finished reading I cautiously glanced at the door, and, finding it still on the crack, turned and smiled subtly upon Lezard and Fooss.

In their slowly spreading grins I saw they agreed with me that somebody, signing himself James Skaw, was still trying to hoax the Great Zoölogical Society of Bronx Park.

"Gentlemen," I said aloud, injecting innocent enthusiasm into my voice, "this secret expedition to Baffin Land which we three are about to organise is destined to be without doubt the most scientifically prolific field expedition ever organised by man.

"Imagine an entire herd of mammoths preserved in mud and ice through all these thousands of years!

"Gentlemen, no discovery ever made has even remotely approached in importance the discovery made by this simple, illiterate trapper, James Skaw."

"I thought," protested Lezard, "that *we* are to be announced as the discoverers."

"We are," said I, "the discoverers of James Skaw, which makes us technically the finders of the ice-preserved herd of mammoths—*technically,* you understand. A few thousand dollars," I added, carelessly, "ought to satiate James Skaw."

"We could name dot glacier after him," suggested Dr. Fooss.

"Certainly—the Skaw Glacier. That ought to be enough glory for him. It ought to satisfy him and prevent any indiscreet remarks," nodded Lezard.

"Gentlemen," said I, "there is only one detail that really troubles me. Ought we to notify our honoured and respected Chief of Division concerning this discovery?"

"Do you mean, should we tell that accomplished and fascinating lady, Professor Bottomly, about this herd of mammoths?" I asked in a loud, clear voice. And immediately answered my own question: "No." I said, "no, dear friends. Professor Bottomly already has too much responsibility weighing upon her distinguished mind. No, dear brothers in science, we should steal away unobserved as though setting out upon an ordinary field expedition. And when we return with fresh and immortal laurels such as no man before has ever worn, no doubt that our generous-minded Chief of Division will weave for us further wreaths to crown our brows—the priceless garlands of professional approval!" And I made a horrible face at my co-conspirators.

Before I finished Lezard had taken his own face in his hands for the purpose of stifling raucous and untimely mirth. As for Dr. Fooss, his small, porcine eyes snapped and twinkled madly behind his spectacles, but he seemed rather inclined to approve my flowers of rhetoric.

"Ja," said he, "so iss it besser oursellufs dot gefrozenss herd von elephanten to discover, und, by and by, die elephanten bei der Pronx Bark home yet again once more to bring. We shall therefore much praise thereby bekommen. Ach wass!"

"Gentlemen," said I, distinctly, "it is decided, then, that we shall say nothing concerning the true object of this expedition to Professor Bottomly."

Lezard and Fooss nodded assent. Then, in the silence, we all strained our ears to listen. And presently we detected the scarcely heard sound of cautiously retreating footsteps down the corridor.

When it was safe to do so I arose and closed my door.

"I think," said I, with a sort of infernal cheerfulness in my tones, "that we are about to do something jocose to Jane Bottomly."

"A few," said Professor Lezard. He rose and silently executed a complicated ballet-step.

"I shall laff," said Dr. Fooss, earnestly, "und I shall laff, und I shall laff—ach Gott how I shall laff my pally head off!"

I folded my arms and turned romanesquely toward the direction in which Professor Bottomly had retreated.

"Viper!" I said. "The Bronx shall nourish you in its bosom no more! Fade away, Ophidian!"

The sentiment was applauded by all. There chanced to be in my desk a bottle marked: "That's all!" On the label somebody had written: "Do it now!" We did.

II

It was given out at the Bronx that our field expedition to Baffin Land was to be undertaken solely for the purpose of bringing back living specimens of the five-spotted Arctic woodcock—*Philohela quinquemaculata*—in order to add to our onomatology and our glossary of onomatopœia an ontogenesis of this important but hitherto unstudied sub-species.

I trust I make myself clear. Scientific statements should be as clear as the Spuyten Duyvil. *Sola in stagno salus!*

But two things immediately occurred which worried us; Professor Bottomly sent us official notification that she approved our expedition to Baffin Land, designated the steamer we were to take, and enclosed tickets. That scared us. Then to add to our perplexity Professor Bottomly disappeared, leaving Dr. Daisy Delmour in charge of her department during what she announced might be "a somewhat prolonged absence on business."

And during the four feverish weeks of our pretended preparations for Baffin Land not one word did we hear from Jane Bottomly, which caused us painful inquietude as the hour approached for our departure.

Was this formidable woman actually intending to let us depart alone for the Golden Glacier? Was she too lazy to rob us of the secretly contemplated glory which we had pretended awaited us?

We had been so absolutely convinced that she would forbid our expedition, pack us off elsewhere, and take charge herself of an exploring party to Baffin Land, that, as the time for our leaving drew near we became first uneasy, and then really alarmed.

It would be a dreadful jest on us if she made us swallow our own concoction; if she revealed to our colleagues our pretended knowledge of the

Golden Glacier and James Skaw and the supposedly ice-imbedded herd of mammoths, and then publicly forced us to investigate this hoax.

More horrible still would it be if she informed the newspapers and gave them a hint to make merry over the three wise men of the Bronx who went to Baffin Land in a boat.

"*What* do you suppose that devious and secretive female is up to?" inquired Lezard who, within the last few days, had grown thin with worry. "Is it possible that she is sufficiently degraded to suspect us of trying to put one over on her? Is that what she is now doing to us?"

"*Terminus est*—it is the limit!" said I.

He turned a morbid eye upon me. "She is making a monkey of us. That's what!"

"*Suspendenda omnia naso,*" I nodded; "*tarde sed tute.*" When I think aloud in Latin it means that I am deeply troubled. "*Suum quemque scelus agitat.* Do you get me, Professor? I'm sorry I attempted to be sportive with this terrible woman. The curse of my scientific career has been periodical excesses of frivolity. See where this frolicsome impulse has landed me!—*super abyssum ambulans. Trahit sua quemque voluptas; transeat in exemplum!* She means to let us go to our destruction on this mammoth frappé affair."

But Dr. Fooss was optimistic:

"I tink she iss alretty herselluf by dot Baffin Land ge-gone," he said. "I tink she has der bait ge-swallowed. Ve vait; ve see; und so iss it ve know."

"But why hasn't she stopped our preparations?" I demanded. "If she wants all the glory herself why does she permit us to incur this expense in getting ready?"

"No mans can to know der vorkings of der mental brocess by a Frauenzimmer," said Dr. Fooss, wagging his head.

The suspense became nerve-racking; we were obliged to pack our camping kits; and it began to look as though we would have either to sail the next morning or to resign from the Bronx Park Zoölogical Society, because all the evening papers had the story in big type—the details and objects of the expedition, the discovery of the herd of mammoths in cold storage, the prompt organization of an expedition to secure this unparalleled deposit of prehistoric mammalia—everything was there staring at us in violent print, excepting only the name of the discoverer and the names of those composing the field expedition.

"She means to betray us after we have sailed," said Lezard, greatly depressed. "We might just as well resign now before this hoax explodes and bespatters us. We can take our chances in vaudeville or as lecturing professors with the movies."

I thought so, too, in point of fact we all had gathered in my study to write out our resignations, when there came a knock at the door and Dr. Daisy Delmour walked in.

Oddly enough I had not before met Dr. Delmour personally; only formal written communications had hitherto passed between us. My idea of her had doubtless been inspired by the physical and intellectual aberrations of her chief; I naturally supposed her to be either impossible and corporeally redundant, or intellectually and otherwise as weazened as last year's Li-che nut.

I was criminally mistaken. And why Lezard, who knew her, had never set me right I could not understand. I comprehended later.

For the feminine assistant of Professor Jane Bottomly, who sauntered into my study and announced herself, had the features of Athene, the smile of Aphrodite, and the figure of Psyche. I believe I do not exaggerate these scientific details, although it has been said of me that any pretty girl distorts my vision and my intellectual balance to the detriment of my calmer reason and my differentiating ability.

"Gentlemen," said Dr. Delmour, while we stood in a respectful semicircle before her, modestly conscious of our worth, our toes turned out, and each man's features wreathed with that politely unnatural smirk which masculine features assume when confronted by feminine beauty. "Gentlemen, on the eve of your proposed departure for Baffin Land in quest of living specimens of the five-spotted *Philohela quinquemaculata*, I have been instructed by Professor Bottomly to announce to you a great good fortune for her, for you, for the Bronx, for America, for the entire civilized world.

"It has come to Professor Bottomly's knowledge, recently I believe, that an entire herd of mammoths lie encased in the mud and ice of the vast flat marshes which lie south of the terminal moraine of the Golden Glacier in that part of Baffin Land known as Dr. Cook's Peninsula.

"The credit of this epoch-making discovery is Professor Bottomly's entirely. How it happened, she did not inform me. One month ago today she sailed in great haste for Baffin Land. At this very hour she is doubtless standing all alone upon the frozen surface of that wondrous marsh, contemplating with reverence and awe and similar holy emotions the fruits of her own unsurpassed discovery!"

Dr. Delmour's lovely features became delicately suffused and transfigured as she spoke; her exquisite voice thrilled with generous emotion; she clasped her snowy hands and gazed, enraptured, at the picture of Dr. Bottomly which her mind was so charmingly evoking.

"Perhaps," she whispered, "perhaps at this very instant, in the midst of that vast and flat and solemn desolation the only protuberance visible for miles and miles is Professor Bottomly. Perhaps the pallid Arctic sun is setting behind the majestic figure of Professor Bottomly, radiating a blinding glory to the zenith, illuminating the crowning act of her career with its unearthly aura!"

She gazed at us out of dimmed and violet eyes.

"Gentlemen," she said, "I am ordered to take command of this expedition of yours; I am ordered to sail with you tomorrow morning on the Labrador and Baffin Line steamer *Dr. Cook.*

"The object of your expedition, therefore, is not to be the quest of *Philohela quinquemaculata;* your duty now is to corroborate the almost miraculous discovery of Professor Bottomly, and to disinter for her the vast herd of frozen mammoths, pack and pickle them, and get them to the Bronx.

"Tomorrow's morning papers will have the entire story: the credit and responsibility for the discovery and the expedition belong to Professor Bottomly, and will be given to her by the press and the populace of our great republic.

"It is her wish that no other names be mentioned. Which is right. To the discoverer belongs the glory. Therefore, the marsh is to be named Bottomly's Marsh, and the Glacier, Bottomly's Glacier.

"Yours and mine is to be the glory of laboring incognito under the direction of the towering scientific intellect of the age, Professor Bottomly.

"And the most precious legacy you can leave your children—if you get married and have any—is that you once wielded the humble pick and shovel for Jane Bottomly on the bottomless marsh which bears her name!"

* * *

After a moment's silence we three men ventured to look sideways at each other. We had certainly killed Professor Bottomly, scientifically speaking. The lady was practically dead. The morning papers would consummate the murder. We didn't know whether we wanted to laugh or not.

She was now virtually done for; that seemed certain. So greedily had this egotistical female swallowed the silly bait we offered, so arrogantly had she planned to eliminate everybody excepting herself from the credit of the discovery, that there seemed now nothing left for us to do except to watch her hurdling deliriously toward destruction. *Should* we burst into hellish laughter?

We looked hard at Dr. Delmour and we decided not to—yet.

Said I: "To assist at the final apotheosis of Professor Bottomly makes us very, very happy. We are happy to remain incognito, mere ciphers blotted out by the fierce white light which is about to beat upon Professor Bottomly, fore and aft. We are happy that our participation in this astonishing affair shall never be known to science.

"But, happiest of all are we, dear Dr. Delmour, in the knowledge that *you* are to be with us and of us, incognito on this voyage now imminent; that you are to be our revered and beloved leader.

"And I, for one, promise you personally the undivided devotion of a man whose entire and austere career has been dedicated to science—in *all* its branches."

I stepped forward rather gracefully and raised her little hand to my lips to let her see that even the science of gallantry had not been neglected by me.

Dr. Daisy Delmour blushed.

"Therefore," said I, "considering the fact that our names are not to figure in this expedition; and, furthermore, in consideration of the fact that *you* are going, we shall be very, very happy to accompany you, Dr Delmour." I again saluted her hand, and again Dr. Delmour blushed and looked sideways at Professor Lezard.

III

It was, to be accurate, exactly twenty-three days later that our voyage by sea and land ended one Monday morning upon the gigantic terminal moraine of the Golden Glacier, Cook's Peninsula, Baffin Land.

Four pack-mules carried our luggage, four more bore our persons; an arctic dicky-bird sat on a bowlder and said, "Pilly-willy-willy! Tweet! Tweet!"

As we rode out to the bowlder-strewn edge of the moraine the rising sun greeted us cordially, illuminating below us the flat surface of the marsh which stretched away to the east and south as far as the eye could see.

So flat was it that we immediately made out the silhouettes of two mules tethered below us a quarter of a mile away.

Something about the attitude of these mules arrested our attention, and, gazing upon them through our field-glasses we beheld Professor Bottomly.

That resourceful lady had mounted a pneumatic hammock upon the two mules, their saddles had sockets to fit the legs of the galvanized iron tripod.

No matter in which way the mules turned, sliding swivels on the hollow steel frames regulated the hammock slung between them. It was an infernal invention.

There lay Jane Bottomly asleep, her back hair drying over the hammock's edge, gilded to a peroxide lustre by the rays of the rising sun.

I gazed upon her with a sort of ferocious pity. Her professional days were numbered. *I* also had her number!

"How majestically she slumbers," whispered Dr. Delmour to me, "dreaming, doubtless, of her approaching triumph."

Dr. Fooss and Professor Lezard, driving the pack mules ahead of them, were already riding out across the marsh.

"Daisy," I said, leaning from my saddle and taking one of her gloved hands into mine, "the time has come for me to disillusion you. There are no mammoths in that mud down there."

She looked at me in blue-eyed amazement.

"You are mistaken," she said; "Professor Bottomly is celebrated for the absolute and painstaking accuracy of her deductions and the boldness and the imagination of her scientific investigations. She is the most cautious scientist in America; she would never announce such a discovery to the newspapers unless she were perfectly certain of its truth."

I was sorry for this young girl. I pressed her hand because I was sorry for her. After a few moments of deepest thought I felt so sorry for her that I kissed her.

"You mustn't," said Dr. Delmour, blushing.

The things we mustn't do are so many that I can't always remember all of them.

"Daisy," I said, "shall we pledge ourselves to each other for eternity—here in the presence of this immemorial glacier which moves a thousand inches a year—I mean an inch every thousand years—here in these awful solitudes where incalculable calculations could not enlighten us concerning the number of cubic tons of mud in that marsh—here in the presence of these innocent mules—"

"Oh, look!" exclaimed Dr. Delmour, lifting her flushed cheek from my shoulder. "There is a man in the hammock with Professor Bottomly!"

I levelled my field-glasses incredulously. Good Heavens! There *was* a man there. He was sitting on the edge of the hammock in a dejected attitude, his booted legs dangling.

And, as I gazed, I saw the arm of Professor Bottomly raised as though groping instinctively for something in her slumber—saw her fingers close upon the blue-flannel shirt of her companion, saw his timid futile attempts to elude her, saw him inexorably hauled back and his head forcibly pillowed upon her ample chest.

"Daisy!" I faltered, "what does yonder scene of presumable domesticity mean?"

"I—I haven't the faintest idea!" she stammered.

"Is that lady married! Or is this revelry?" I asked, sternly.

"She wasn't married when she sailed from N-New-York," faltered Dr. Delmour.

We rode forward in pained silence, spurring on until we caught up with Lezard and Fooss and the pack-mules; then we all pressed ahead, a prey, now, to the deepest moral anxiety and agitation.

The splashing of our mule's feet on the partly melted surface of the mud aroused the man as we rode up and he scrambled madly to get out of the hammock as soon as he saw us.

A detaining feminine hand reached mechanically for his collar, groped aimlessly for a moment, and fell across the hammock's edge. Evidently its owner was too sleepy for effort.

Meanwhile the man who had floundered free from the hammock, leaped overboard and came hopping stiffly over the slush toward us like a badly-winged snipe.

"Who are you?" I demanded, drawing bridle so suddenly that I found myself astride of my mule's ears. Sliding back into the saddle, I repeated the challenge haughtily, inwardly cursing my horsemanship.

He stood balancing his lank six feet six of bony altitude for a few moments without replying. His large gentle eyes of baby blue were fixed on me.

"Speak!" I said. "The reputation of a lady is at stake! Who are you? We ask, before we shoot you, for purpose of future identification."

He gazed at me wildly. "I dunno who I be," he replied. "My name *was* James Skaw before that there lady went an' changed it on me. She says she has changed my name to hers. I dunno. All I know is I'm married."

"Married!" echoed Dr. Delmour.

He looked dully at the girl, then fixed his large mild eyes on me.

"A mission priest done it for her a month ago when we was hikin' towards Fort Carcajou. Hoonhel are you?" he added.

I informed him with dignity; he blinked at me, at the others, at the mules. Then he said with infinite bitterness:

"You're a fine guy, ain't you, a-wishin' this here lady onto a pore pelt-hunter what ain't never done nothin' to you!"

"Who did you say I wished on you?" I demanded, bewildered.

"That there lady a-sleepin' into the nuptool hammick! You wished her onto me—yaas you did! Whatnhel have I done to you, hey?"

We were dumb. He shoved his hand into his pocket, produced a slug of twist, slowly gnawed off a portion, and buried the remains in his vast jaw.

"All I done to you," he said, "was to write you them letters sayin's as how I found a lot of ellerphants into the mud.

"What you done to me was to sent that there lady here. Was that gratitood? Man to man I ask you?"

A loud snore from the hammock startled us all. James Skaw twisted his neck turkey-like, and looked warily at the hammock, then turning toward me:

"Aw," he said, "she don't never wake up till I have breakfast ready."

"James Skaw," I said, "tell me what has happened. On my word of honour I don't know."

He regarded me with lack-lustre eyes.

"I was a-settin' onto a bowlder," said he, "a-figurin' out whether you was a-comin' or not, when that there lady rides up with her led-mule a trailin'.

"Sez she: 'Are you James Skaw?'

"'Yes, marm,' sez I, kinder scared an' puzzled.

"'Where is them ellerphants?' sez she, reachin' down from her saddle an' takin' me by the shirt collar, an' beatin' me with her umbrella.

"Sez I, 'I have wrote to a certain gent that I would show him them ellerphants for a price. Bein' strictly hones' I can't show 'em to no one else until I hear from him.'

"With that she continood to argoo the case with her umbrella, never lettin' go of my shirt collar. Sir, she argood until dinner time, an' then she resoomed the debate until I fell asleep. The last I knowed she was still conversin'.

"An' so it went next day, all day long, an' the next day. I couldn't stand it no longer so I started for Fort Carcajou. But she bein' onto a mule, run me down easy, an' kep' beside me conversin' volooble.

"Sir, do you know what it is to listen to umbrella argooment every day, all day long, from sun-up to night-fall? An' then some more?

"I was loony, I tell you, when we met the mission priest. 'Marry me,' sez she, 'or I'll talk you to death!'" I didn't realise what she was sayin' an' what I answered. But them words I uttered done the job, it seems.

"We camped there an' slep' for two days without wakin.' When I waked up I was convalescent.

"She was good to me. She made soup an' she wrapped blankets onto me an' she didn't talk no more until I was well enough to endoor it.

"An' by'm'by she brooke the nooze to me that we was married an' that she had went as far as to marry me in the sacred cause of science because man an' wife is one, an' what I knowed about them ellerphants she now had a right to know.

"Sir, she had put one over on me. So bein' strickly hones' I had to show her where them ellerphants lay froze up under the marsh."

IV

Where the ambition of this infatuated woman had led her appalled us all. The personal sacrifice she had made in the name of science awed us.

Still when I remembered that detaining arm sleepily lifted from the nuptial hammock, I was not so certain concerning her continued martyrdom.

I cast an involuntary glance of critical appraisal upon James Skaw. He had the golden hair and beard of the early Christian martyr. His features were classically regular; he stood six feet six; he was lean because fit, sound as a hound's tooth, and really a superb specimen of masculine health.

Curry him and trim him and clothe him in evening dress and his physical appearance would make a sensation at the Court of St. James. Only his English required manicuring.

The longer I looked at him the better I comprehended that detaining hand from the hammock. *Fabas indulcet fames.*

Then, with a shock, it rushed over me that there evidently had been some ground for this man's letters to me concerning a herd of frozen mammoths.

Professor Bottomly had not only married him to obtain the information but here she was still camping on the marsh!

"James Skaw," I said, tremulously, "where are those mammoths?"

He looked at me, then made a vague gesture:

"Under the mud—everywhere—all around us."

"Has *she* seen them?"

"Yes, I showed her about a hundred. There's one under you. Look! you can see him through the slush."

"Ach Gott!" burst from Dr. Fooss, and he tottered in his saddle. Lezard, frightfully pale, passed a shaking hand over his brow. As for me my hair became dank with misery, for there directly under my feet, the vast hairy bulk of a mammoth lay dimly visible through the muddy ice.

What I had done to myself when I was planning to do Professor Bottomly suddenly burst upon me in all its hideous proportions. Fame, the plaudits of the world, the highest scientific honours—all these in my effort to annihilate her, I had deliberately thrust upon this woman to my own everlasting detriment and disgrace.

A sort of howl escaped from Dr. Fooss, who had dismounted and who had been scratching in the slush with his feet like a hen. For already this slight gallinaceous effort of his had laid bare a hairy section of frozen mammoth.

Lezard, weeping bitterly, squatted beside him clawing at the thin skin of ice with a pick-axe.

It seemed more than I could bear and I flung myself from my mule and seizing a spade, fell violently to work, the tears of rage and mortification coursing down my cheeks.

"Hurrah!" cried Dr. Delmour, excitedly, scrambling down from her mule and lifting a box of dynamite from her saddle-bags.

Transfigured with enthusiasm she seized a crowbar, traced in the slush the huge outlines of the buried beast, then, measuring with practiced eye the irregular zone of cleavage, she marked out a vast oval, dug holes along it with her bar, dropped into each hole a stick of dynamite, got out the batteries and wires, attached the fuses, covered each charge, and retired on a run toward the moraine, unreeling wire as she sped upward among the bowlders.

Half frantic with grief and half mad with the excitement of the moment we still had sense enough to shoulder our tools and drive our mules back across the moraine.

Only the mule-hammock in which reposed Professor Bottomly remained on the marsh. For one horrid instant temptation assailed me to press the button before James Skaw could lead the hammock-mules up to the moraine. It was my closest approach to a crime.

With a shudder I viewed the approach of the mules. James Skaw led them by the head; the hammock on its bar and swivels swung gently between them; Professor Bottomly slept, lulled, no doubt, to deeper slumber by the gently swaying hammock.

When the hammock came up, one by one we gazed upon its unconscious occupant.

And, even amid dark and revengeful thoughts, amid a mental chaos of grief and fury and frantic self-reproach, I had to admit to myself that Jane Bottomly was a fine figure of a woman, and good-looking, too, and that her hair was all her own and almost magnificent at that.

With a modiste to advise her, a maid to dress her, I myself might have—but let that pass. Only as I gazed upon the fresh complexion and the softly parted red lips of Professor Bottomly, and as I noted the beautiful white throat and prettily shaped hands, a newer, bitterer, and more overwhelming despair seized me; and I realized now that perhaps I had thrown away more than fame, honours, applause; I had perhaps thrown away love!

At that moment Professor Bottomly awoke. For a moment her lilac-tinted eyes had a dazed expression, then they widened, and she lay very quietly looking from one to another of us, cradled in the golden glory of her hair, perfectly mistress of herself, and her mind as clear as a bell.

"Well," she said, "so you have arrived at last." And to Dr. Delmour she smilingly extended a cool, fresh hand.

"Have you met my husband?" she inquired.

We admitted that we had.

"James!" she called.

At the sound of her voice James Skaw hopped nimbly to do her bidding. A tender smile came into her face as she gazed upon her husband. She made no explanation concerning him, no apology for him. And, watching her, it slowly filtered into my mind that she liked him.

With one hand in her husband's and one on Dr. Delmour's arm she listened to Daisy's account of what we were about to do to the imbedded mammoth, and nodded approval.

James Skaw turned the mules so that she might watch the explosion. She twisted up her hair, then sat up in her hammock; Daisy Delmour pressed the electric button; there came a deep jarring sound, a vast upheaval, and up out of the mud rose *five or six dozen mammoths* and toppled gently over upon the surface of the ice.

Miserable as we were at such an astonishing spectacle we raised a tragic cheer as Professor Bottomly sprang out of her hammock and, telling Dr. Delmour to get a camera, seized her husband and sped down to where one of the great, hairy frozen beasts lay on the ice in full sunshine.

And then we tasted the last drop of gall which our over-slopping cup of bitterness held for us; Professor Bottomly climbed up the sides of the frozen mammoth, dragging her husband with her, and stood there waving a little American flag while Dr. Delmour used up every film in the camera to record the scientific triumph of the ages.

Almost idiotic with the shock of my great grief I reeled and tottered away among the bowlders. Fooss came to find me; and when he found me he kicked me violently for some time. "Esel dumkopf!" he said.

When he was tired Lezard came and fell upon me, showering me with kicks and anathema.

When he went away I beat my head with my fists for a while. Every little helped.

After a time I smelled cooking, and presently Dr. Delmour came to where I sat huddled up miserably in the sun behind the bowlder.

"Luncheon is ready," she said.

I groaned.

"Don't you feel well?"

I said that I did not.

She lingered apparently with the idea of cheering me up. "It's been such fun," she said. "Professor Lezard and I have already located over a hundred and fifty mammoths within a short distance of here, and apparently there are hundreds, if not thousands, more in the vicinity. The ivory alone is worth over a million dollars. Isn't it wonderful!"

She laughed excitedly and danced away to join the others. Then, out of the black depth of my misery a feeble gleam illuminated the Stygian obscurity. There was one way left to stay my approaching downfall—only one. Professor Bottomly meant to get rid of me, "for the good of the Bronx," but there remained a way to ward off impending disaster. And though I had lost the opportunity of my life by disbelieving the simple honesty of James Skaw,—and though the honors and emoluments and applause which ought to have been mine were destined for this determined woman, still, if I kept my head, I should be able to hold my job at the Bronx.

Dr. Delmour was immovable in the good graces of Professor Bottomly; and the only way for me to retain my position was to marry her.

The thought comforted me. After a while I felt well enough to arise and partake of some luncheon.

They were all seated around the campfire when I approached. I was welcomed politely, inquiries concerning my health were offered; but the coldly malevolent glare of Dr. Fooss and the calm contempt in Lezard's gaze chilled me; and I squatted down by Daisy Delmour and accepted a dish of soup from her in mortified silence.

Professor Bottomly and James Skaw were feasting connubially side by side, and she was selecting titbits for him which he dutifully swallowed, his large mild eyes gazing at vacancy in a gentle, surprised sort of way as he gulped down what she offered him.

Neither of them paid any attention to anybody else.

Fooss gobbled his lunch in a sort of raging silence; Lezard, on the other side of Dr. Delmour, conversed with her continually in undertones.

After a while his persistent murmuring began to make me uneasy, even suspicious, and I glared at him sideways.

Daisy Delmour, catching my eye, blushed, hesitated, then leaning over toward me with delightful confusion she whispered:

"I know that you will be glad to hear that I have just promised to marry your closest friend, Professor Lezard—"

"What!" I shouted with all my might, "have *you* put one over on me, too?"

Lezard and Fooss seized me, for I had risen and was jumping up and down and splashing them with soup.

"Everybody has put one over on me!" I shrieked. "Everybody! Now I'm going to put one over on myself!"

And I lifted my plate of soup and reversed it on my head.

They told me later that I screamed for half an hour before I swooned.

Afterward, my intellect being impaired, instead of being dismissed from my department, I was promoted to the position which I now hold as President Emeritus of the Consolidated Art Museums and Zoölogical Gardens of the City of New York.

I have easy hours, little to do, and twenty ornamental stenographers and typewriters engaged upon my memoirs which I dictate when I feel like it, steeped in the aroma of the most inexpensive cigar I can buy at the Rolling Stone Inn.

There is one typist in particular—but let that pass.

Vir sapit qui pauca loquitor. ✵

Un Peu d'Amour

When I returned to the plateau from my investigation of the crater, I realized that I had descended the grassy pit as far as any human being could descend. No living creature could pass that barrier of flame and vapour. Of that I was convinced.

Now, not only the crater but its steaming effluvia was utterly unlike anything I had ever before beheld. There was no trace of lava to be seen, or of pumice, ashes, or of volcanic rejecta in any form whatever. There were no sulphuric odours, no pungent fumes, nothing to teach the olfactory nerves what might be the nature of the silvery steam rising from the crater incessantly in a vast circle, ringing its circumference halfway down the slope.

Under this thin curtain of steam a ring of pale yellow flames played and sparkled, completely encircling the slope.

The crater was about half a mile deep; the sides sloped gently to the bottom.

But the odd feature of the entire phenomenon was this: the bottom of the crater seemed to be entirely free from fire and vapour. It was disk-shaped, sandy, and flat, about a quarter of a mile in diameter. Through my field-glasses I could see patches of grass and wild flowers growing in the sand here and there, and the sparkle of water, and a crow or two, feeding and walking about.

I looked at the girl who was standing beside me, then cast a glance around at the very unusual landscape.

We were standing on the summit of a mountain some two thousand feet high, looking into a cup-shaped depression or crater, on the edges of which we stood.

This low, flat-topped mountain, as I say, was grassy and quite treeless, although it rose like a truncated sugar-cone out of a wilderness of trees which stretched for miles below us, north, south, east, and west, bordered on the horizon by towering blue mountains, their distant ranges enclosing the forests as in a vast amphitheatre.

From the centre of this enormous green floor of foliage rose our grassy hill, and it appeared to be the only irregularity which broke the level wilderness as far as the base of the dim blue ranges encircling the horizon.

Except for the log bungalow of Mr. Blythe on the eastern edge of this grassy plateau, there was not a human habitation in sight, nor a trace of man's devastating presence in the wilderness around us.

Again I looked questioningly at the girl beside me and she looked back at me rather seriously.

"Shall we seat ourselves here in the sun?" she asked.

I nodded.

Very gravely we settled down side by side on the thick green grass.

"Now," she said, "I shall tell you why I wrote you to come out here. Shall I?"

"By all means, Miss Blythe."

Sitting cross-legged, she gathered her ankles into her hands, settling herself as snugly on the grass as a bird settles on its nest.

"The phenomena of nature," she said, "have always interested me intensely, not only from the artistic angle but from the scientific point of view.

"It is different with father. He is a painter; he cares only for the artistic aspects of nature. Phenomena of a scientific nature bore him. Also, you may have noticed that he is of a—a slightly impatient disposition."

I had noticed it. He had been anything but civil to me when I arrived the night before, after a five-hundred mile trip on a mule, from the nearest railroad—a journey performed entirely alone and by compass, there being no trail after the first fifty miles.

To characterize Blythe as slightly impatient was letting him down easy. He was a selfish, bad-tempered old pig.

"Yes," I said, answering her, "I did notice a negligible trace of impatience about your father."

She flushed.

"You see I did not inform my father that I had written to you. He doesn't like strangers; he doesn't like scientists. I did not dare tell him that I had asked you to come out here. It was entirely my own idea. I felt that I *must* write you because I am positive that what is happening in this wilderness is of vital scientific importance."

"How did you get a letter out of this distant and desolate place?" I asked.

"Every two months the storekeeper at Windflower Station sends in a man and a string of mules with staples for us. The man takes our further orders and our letters back to civilization."

I nodded.

"He took my letter to you—among one or two others I sent—"

A charming colour came into her cheeks. She was really extremely pretty. I liked that girl. When a girl blushes when she speaks to a man he immediately accepts her heightened colour as a personal tribute. This is not vanity: it is merely a proper sense of personal worthiness.

She said thoughtfully:

"The mail bag which that man brought to us last week contained a letter which, had I received it earlier, would have made my invitation to you unnecessary. I'm sorry I disturbed you."

"*I* am not," said I, looking into her beautiful eyes.

I twisted my mustache into two attractive points, shot my cuffs, and glanced at her again, receptively.

She had a far-away expression in her eyes. I straightened my necktie. A man, without being vain, ought to be conscious of his own worth.

"And now," she continued, "I am going to tell you the various reasons why I asked so celebrated a scientist as yourself to come here."

I thanked her for her encomium.

"Ever since my father retired from Boston to purchase this hill and the wilderness surrounding it," she went on, "ever since he came here to live a hermit's life—a life devoted solely to painting landscapes—I also have lived here all alone with him.

"That is three years, now. And from the very beginning—from the very first day of our arrival, somehow or other I was conscious that there was something abnormal about this corner of the world."

She bent forward, lowering her voice a trifle:

"Have you noticed," she asked, "that so many things seem to be *circular* out here?"

"Circular?" I repeated, surprised.

"Yes. That crater is circular; so is the bottom of it; so is this plateau, and the hill; and the forests surrounding us; and the mountain ranges on the horizon."

"But all this is natural."

"Perhaps. But in those woods, down there, there are, here and there, great circles of crumbling soil—*perfect* circles a mile in diameter."

"Mounds built by prehistoric man, no doubt."

She shook her head:

"These are not prehistoric mounds."

"Why not?"

"Because they have been freshly made."

"How do you know?"

"The earth is freshly upheaved; great trees, partly uprooted, slant at every angle from the sides of the enormous piles of newly upturned earth; sand and stones are still sliding from the raw ridges."

She leaned nearer and dropped her voice still lower:

"More than that," she said, "my father and I both have seen one of these huge circles *in the making!*"

"What!" I exclaimed, incredulously.

"It is true. We have seen several. And it enrages father."

"Enrages?"

"Yes, because it upsets the trees where he is painting landscapes, and tilts them in every direction. Which, of course, ruins his picture; and he is obliged to start another, which vexes him dreadfully."

I think I must have gaped at her in sheer astonishment.

"But there is something more singular than that for you to investigate," she said calmly. "Look down at that circle of steam which makes a perfect ring around the bowl of the crater, halfway down. Do you see the flicker of fire under the vapour?"

"Yes."

She leaned so near and spoke in such a low voice that her fragrant breath fell upon my cheek:

"In the fire, under the vapours, there are little animals."

"What!!"

"Little beasts live in the fire—slim, furry creatures, smaller than a weasel. I've seen them peep out of the fire and scurry back into it. . . . *Now* are you sorry that I wrote you to come? And will you forgive me for bringing you out here?"

An indescribable excitement seized me, endowing me with a fluency and eloquence unusual:

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart!" I cried; "—from the depths of a heart the emotions of which are entirely and exclusively of scientific origin!"

In the impulse of the moment I held out my hand; she laid hers in it with charming diffidence.

"Yours is the discovery," I said. "Yours shall be the glory. Fame shall crown you; and perhaps if there remains any reflected light in the form of a by-product, some modest and negligible little ray may chance to illuminate me."

Surprised and deeply moved by my eloquence, I bent over her hand and saluted it with my lips.

She thanked me. Her pretty face was rosy.

It appeared that she had three cows to milk, new-laid eggs to gather, and the construction of some fresh butter to be accomplished.

At the bars of the grassy pasture slope she dropped me a curtsey, declining very shyly to let me carry her lacteal paraphernalia.

So I continued on to the bungalow garden, where Blythe sat on a camp stool under a green umbrella, painting a picture of something or other.

"Mr. Blythe!" I cried, striving to subdue my enthusiasm. "The eyes of the scientific world are now open upon this house! The searchlight of Fame is about to be turned upon you—"

"I prefer privacy," he interrupted. "That's why I came here. I'll be obliged if you'll turn off that searchlight."

"But, my dear Mr. Blythe—"

"I want to be let alone," he repeated irritably. "I came out here to paint and to enjoy privately my own paintings."

If what stood on his easel was a sample of his pictures, nobody was likely to share his enjoyment.

"Your work," said I, politely, "is—is—"

"Is what!" he snapped. "*What* is it—if you think you know?"

"It is entirely, so to speak, *per se*—by itself—"

"What the devil do you mean by that?"

I looked at his picture, appalled. The entire canvas was one monotonous vermillion conflagration. I examined it with my head on one side, then on the other side; I made a funnel with both hands and peered intently through it at the picture. A menacing murmuring sound came from him.

"Satisfying—exquisitely satisfying," I concluded. "I have often seen such sunsets—"

"What!"

"I mean such prairie fires—"

"Damnation!" he exclaimed. "I'm painting a bowl of nasturtiums!"

"I was speaking purely in metaphor," said I with a sickly smile. "To me a nasturtium by the river brink is more than a simple flower. It is a broader, grander, more magnificent, more stupendous symbol. It may mean anything, everything—such as sunsets and conflagrations and Götterdämmerungs! Or—" and my voice was subtly modulated to an appealing and persuasive softness—"it may mean nothing at all—chaos, void, vacuum, negation, the exquisite annihilation of what has never even existed."

He glared at me over his shoulder. If he was infected by Cubist tendencies he evidently had not understood what I said.

"If you won't talk about my pictures I don't mind your investigating this district," he grunted, dabbing at his palette and plastering a wad of vermillion upon his canvas; "but I object to any public invasion of my artistic privacy until I am ready for it."

"When will that be?"

He pointed with one vermilion-soaked brush toward a long, low, log building.

"In that structure," he said, "are packed one thousand and ninety-five paintings—all signed by me. I have executed one or two every day since I came here. When I have painted exactly ten thousand pictures, no more, no less, I shall erect here a gallery large enough to contain them all.

"Only real lovers of art will ever come here to study them. It is five hundred miles from the railroad. Therefore, I shall never have to endure the praises of the dilettante, the patronage of the idler, the vapid rhapsodies of the vulgar. Only those who understand will care to make the pilgrimage."

He waved his brushes at me:

"The conservation of national resources is all well enough—the setting aside of timber reserves, game preserves, bird refuges, all these projects are very good in a way. But I have dedicated this wilderness as a last and only refuge in all the world for true Art! Because true Art, except for my pictures, is, I believe, now practically extinct! . . . You're in my way. Would you mind getting out?"

I had sidled around between him and his bowl of nasturtiums, and I hastily stepped aside. He squinted at the flowers, mixed up a flamboyant mess of colour on his palette, and daubed away with unfeigned satisfaction, no longer noticing me until I started to go. Then:

"What is it you're here for, anyway?" he demanded abruptly. I said with dignity:

"I am here to investigate those huge rings of earth thrown up in the forest as by a gigantic mole." He continued to paint for a few moments:

"Well, go and investigate 'em," he snapped. "I'm not infatuated with your society."

"What do you think they are?" I asked, mildly ignoring his wretched manners.

"I don't know and I don't care, except, that sometimes when I begin to paint several trees, the very trees I'm painting are suddenly heaved up and tilted in every direction, and all my work goes for nothing. *That* makes me mad! Otherwise, the matter has no interest for me."

"But what in the world could cause—"

"I don't know and I don't care!" he shouted, waving palette and brushes angrily. "Maybe it's an army of moles working all together under the ground; maybe it's some species of circular earthquake. I don't know! I don't care! But it annoys me. And if you can devise any scientific means to stop it, I'll be much obliged to you. Otherwise, to be perfectly frank, you bore me."

"The mission of Science," said I solemnly, "is to alleviate the inconveniences of mundane existence. Science, therefore, shall extend a helping hand to her frailer sister, Art—"

"Science can't patronize Art while I'm around!" he retorted. "I won't have it!"

"But, my dear Mr. Blythe—"

"I won't dispute with you, either! I don't like to dispute!" he shouted. "Don't try to make me. Don't attempt to inveigle me into discussion! I know all I want to know. I don't want to know anything you want me to know, either!"

I looked at the old pig in haughty silence, nauseated by his conceit.

After he had plastered a few more tubes of vermilion over his canvas he quieted down, and presently gave me an oblique glance over his shoulder.

"Well," he said, "what else are you intending to investigate?"

"Those little animals that live in the crater fires," I said bluntly.

"Yes," he nodded, indifferently, "there are creatures which live somewhere in the fires of that crater."

"Do you realize what an astounding statement you are making?" I asked.

"It doesn't astound *me.* What do I care whether it astounds you or anybody else? Nothing interests me except Art."

"But—"

"I tell you nothing interests me except Art!" he yelled. "Don't dispute it! Don't answer me! Don't irritate me! I don't care whether anything lives in the fire or not! Let it live there!"

"But have you actually seen live creatures in the flames?"

"Plenty! *Plenty!* What of it? What about it? Let 'em live there, for all I care. I've painted pictures of 'em, too. That's all that interests me."

"What do they look like, Mr. Blythe?"

"Look like? *I* don't know! They look like weasels or rats or bats or cats or—stop asking me questions! It irritates me! It depresses me! Don't ask any more! Why don't you go in to lunch? And—tell my daughter to bring me a bowl of salad out here. *I've* no time to stuff myself. Some people have. *I* haven't. You'd better go in to lunch. . . . And tell my daughter to bring me seven tubes of Chinese vermilion with my salad!"

"You don't mean to mix—" I began, then checked myself before his fury.

"I'd rather eat vermilion paint on my salad than sit here talking to *you!*" he shouted.

I cast a pitying glance at this impossible man, and went into the house. After all, he was *her* father. I *had* to endure him.

* * *

After Miss Blythe had carried to her father a large bucket of lettuce leaves, she returned to the veranda of the bungalow.

A delightful luncheon awaited us; I seated her, then took the chair opposite.

A delicious omelette, fresh biscuit, salad, and strawberry preserves, and a tall tumbler of iced tea imbued me with a sort of mild exhilaration.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Blythe down in the garden, munching his lettuce leaves like an ill-tempered rabbit, and daubing away at his picture while he munched.

"Your father," said I politely, "is something of a genius."

"I am so glad you think so," she said gratefully. "But don't tell him so. He has been surfeited with praise in Boston. That is why we came out here."

"Art," said I, "is like science, or tobacco, or tooth-wash. Every man to his own brand. Personally, I don't care for his kind. But who can say which is the best kind of anything? Only the consumer. Your father is his own consumer.

He is the best judge of what he likes. And that is the only true test of art, or anything else."

"How delightfully you reason!" she said. "How logically, how generously!"

"Reason is the handmaid of Science, Miss Blythe."

She seemed to understand me. Her quick intelligence surprised me, because I myself was not perfectly sure whether I had emitted piffle or an epigram.

As we ate our strawberry preserves we discussed ways and means of capturing a specimen of the little fire creatures which, as she explained, so frequently peeped out at her from the crater fires, and, at her slightest movement, scurried back again into the flames. Of course I believed that this was only her imagination. Yet, for years I had entertained a theory that fire supported certain unknown forms of life.

"I have long believed," said I, "that fire is inhabited by living organisms which require the elements and temperature of active combustion for their existence—microörganisms, but not," I added smilingly, "any higher type of life."

"In the fireplace," she ventured diffidently, "I sometime see curious things—dragons and snakes and creatures of grotesque and peculiar shapes."

I smiled indulgently, charmed by this innocently offered contribution to science. Then she rose, and I rose and took her hand in mine, and we wandered over the grass toward the crater, while I explained to her the difference between what we imagine we see in the glowing coals of a grate fire and my own theory that fire is the abode of living animalculae.

On the grassy edge of the crater we paused and looked down the slope, where the circle of steam rose, partly veiling the pale flash of fire underneath.

"How near can we go?" I inquired.

"Quite near. Come; I'll guide you."

Leading me by the hand, she stepped over the brink and we began to descend the easy grass slope together.

There was no difficulty about it at all. Down we went, nearer and nearer to the wall of steam, until at last, when but fifteen feet away from it, I felt the heat from the flames which sparkled below the wall of vapour.

Here we seated ourselves upon the grass, and I knitted my brows and fixed my eyes upon this curious phenomenon, striving to discover some reason for it.

Except for the vapour and the fires, there was nothing whatever volcanic about this spectacle, or in the surroundings.

From where I sat I could see that the bed of fire which encircled the crater, and the wall of vapour which crowned the flames, were about three hundred feet wide. Of course this barrier was absolutely impassable. There was no way of getting through it into the bottom of the crater.

A slight pressure from Miss Blythe's fingers engaged my attention; I turned toward her, and she said:

"There is one more thing about which I have not told you. I feel a little guilty, because *that* is the real reason I asked you to come here."

"What is it?"

"I think there are emeralds on the floor of that crater."

"Emeralds!"

"I *think* so." She felt in the ruffled pocket of her apron, drew out a fragment of mineral, and passed it to me.

I screwed a jeweler's glass into my eye and examined it in astonished silence. It was an emerald; a fine, large, immensely valuable stone, if my experience counted for anything. One side of it was thickly coated with vermilion paint.

"Where did this come from?" I asked in an agitated voice.

"From the floor of the crater. Is it *really* an emerald?"

I lifted my head and stared at the girl incredulously.

"It happened this way," she said excitedly. "Father was painting a picture up there by the edge of the crater. He left his palette on the grass to go to the bungalow for some more tubes of colour. While he was in the house, hunting for the colours which he wanted, I stepped out on the veranda, and I saw some crows alight near the palette and begin to stalk about in the grass. One bird walked right over his wet palette; I stepped out and waved my sun-bonnet to frighten him off, but he had both feet in a sticky mass of Chinese vermilion, and for a moment was unable to free himself.

"I almost caught him, but he flapped away over the edge of the crater, high above the wall of vapour, sailed down onto the crater floor, and alighted.

"But his feet bothered him; he kept hopping about on the bottom of the crater, half running, half flying; and finally he took wing and rose up over the hill.

"As he flew above me, and while I was looking up at his vermilion feet, something dropped from his claws and nearly struck me. It was that emerald."

When I had recovered sufficient composure to speak steadily, I took her beautiful little hand in mine.

"This," said I, "is the most exciting locality I have ever visited for purposes of scientific research. Within this crater may lie millions of value in emeralds. You are probably, today, the wealthiest heiress upon the face of the globe!"

I gave her a winning glance. She smiled, shyly, and blushing withdrew her hand.

For several exquisite minutes I sat there beside her in a sort of heavenly trance. How beautiful she was! How engaging—how sweet—how modestly appreciative of the man beside her, who had little beside his scientific learning, his fame, and a kind heart to appeal to such youth and loveliness as hers!

There was something about her that delicately appealed to me. Sometimes I pondered what this might be; sometimes I wondered how many emeralds lay on that floor of sandy gravel below us.

Yes, I loved her. I realised it now. I could even endure her father for her sake. I should make a good husband. I was quite certain of that.

I turned and gazed upon her, meltingly. But I did not wish to startle her, so I remained silent, permitting the chaste language of my eyes to interpret for her what my lips had not yet murmured. It was a brief but beautiful moment in my life.

"The way to do," said I, "is to trap several dozen crows, smear their feet with glue, tie a ball of Indian twine to the ankle of every bird, then liberate them. Some are certain to fly into the crater and try to scrape the glue off in the sand. Then," I added, triumphantly, "all we have to do is to haul in our birds and detach the wealth of Midas from their sticky claws!"

"That is an excellent suggestion," she said gratefully, "but I can do that after you have gone. All I wanted you to tell me was whether the stone is a genuine emerald."

I gazed at her blankly.

"You are here for purposes of scientific investigation," she added, sweetly. "I should not think of taking your time for the mere sake of accumulating wealth for my father and me."

There didn't seem to be anything for me to say at that moment. Chilled, I gazed at the flashing ring of fire.

And, as I gazed, suddenly I became aware of a little, pointed muzzle, two pricked-up ears, and two ruby-red eyes gazing intently out at me from the mass of flames.

The girl beside me saw it, too.

"Don't move!" she whispered. "That is one of the flame creatures. It may venture out if you keep perfectly still."

Rigid with amazement, I sat like a stone image, staring at the most astounding sight I had ever beheld.

For several minutes the ferret-like creature never stirred from where it crouched in the crater fire; the alert head remained pointed toward us; I could even see that its thick fur must have possessed the qualities of asbestos, because here and there a hair or two glimmered incandescent; and its eyes, nose, and whiskers glowed and glowed as the flames pulsated around it.

After a long while it began to move out of the fire, slowly, cautiously, cunning eyes fixed on us—a small, slim, wiry, weasel-like creature on which the sunlight fell with a vitreous glitter as it crept forward into the grass.

Then, from the fire behind, another creature of the same sort appeared, another, others, then dozens of eager, lithe, little animals appeared everywhere from the flames and began to frisk and play and run about in the grass and nibble the fresh, green, succulent herbage with a snipping sound quite audible to us.

One came so near my feet that I could examine it minutely.

Its fur and whiskers seemed heavy and dense and like asbestos fibre, yet so fine as to appear silky. Its eyes, nose, and claws were scarlet, and seemed to possess a glassy surface.

I waited my opportunity, and when the little thing came nosing along within reach, I seized it.

Instantly it emitted a bewildering series of whistling shrieks, and twisted around to bite me. Its body was icy.

"Don't let it bite!" cried the girl. "Be careful, Mr. Smith!"

But its jaws were toothless; only soft, cold gums pinched me, and I held it twisting and writhing, while the icy temperature of its body began to benumb my fingers and creep up my wrist, paralyzing my arm; and its incessant shrieks deafened me.

In vain I transferred it to the other hand, and then passed it from one hand to the other, as one shifts a lump of ice or a hot potato, in an attempt to endure the temperature: it shrieked and squirmed and doubled, and finally wriggled out of my stiffened and useless hands, and scuttled away into the fire.

It was an overwhelming disappointment. For a moment it seemed unendurable.

"Never mind," I said, huskily, "if I caught one in my hands, I can surely catch another in a trap."

"I am so sorry for your disappointment," she said, pitifully.

"Do *you* care, Miss Blythe?" I asked.

She blushed.

"Of course I care," she murmured.

My hands were too badly frost-nipped to become eloquent. I merely sighed and thrust them into my pockets. Even my arm was too stiff to encircle her shapeful waist. Devotion to Science had temporarily crippled me. Love must wait. But, as we ascended the grassy slope together, I promised myself that I would make her a good husband, and that I should spend at least part of every day of my life in trapping crows and smearing their claws with glue.

That evening I was seated on the veranda beside Wilna—Miss Blythe's name was Wilna—and what with gazing at her and fitting together some of the folding box-traps which I always carried with me—and what with trying to realise the pecuniary magnificence of our future existence together, I was exceedingly busy when Blythe came in to display, as I supposed, his most recent daub to me.

The canvas he carried presented a series of crimson speckles, out of which burst an eruption of green streaks—and it made me think of stepping on a caterpillar.

My instinct was to placate this impossible man. He was *her* father. I meant to honour him if I had to assault him to do it.

"Supremely satisfying!" I nodded, chary of naming the subject. "It is a stride beyond the art of the future: it is a flying leap out of the Not Yet into the Possibly Perhaps! I thank you for enlightening me, Mr. Blythe. I am your debtor."

He fairly snarled at me:

"What are *you* talking about!" he demanded.

I remained modestly mute.

To Wilna he said, pointing passionately at his canvas:

"The crows have been walking all over it again! I'm going to paint in the woods after this, earthquakes or no earthquakes. Have the trees been heaved up anywhere recently?"

"Not since last week," she said, soothingly. "It usually happens after a rain."

"I think I'll risk it then—although it did rain early this morning. I'll do a moonlight down there this evening." And, turning to me: "If you know as much about science as you do about art you won't have to remain here long—I trust."

"What?" said I, very red.

He laughed a highly disagreeable laugh, and marched into the house. Presently he bawled for dinner, and Wilna went away. For her sake I had remained calm and dignified, but presently I went out and kicked up the turf two or three times; and, having foozled my wrath, I went back to dinner, realising that I might as well begin to accustom myself to my future father-in-law.

It seemed that he had a mania for prunes, and that's all he permitted anybody to have for dinner.

Disgusted, I attempted to swallow the loathly stewed fruit, watching Blythe askance as he hurriedly stuffed himself, using a tablespoon, with every symptom of relish.

"Now," he cried, shoving back his chair, "I'm going to paint a moonlight by moonlight. Wilma, if Billy arrives, make him comfortable, and tell him

I'll return by midnight." And without taking the trouble to notice me at all, he strode away toward the veranda, chewing vigorously upon his last prune.

"Your father," said I, "is eccentric. Genius usually is. But he is a most interesting and estimable man. I revere him."

"It is kind of you to say so," said the girl, in a low voice.

I thought deeply for a few moments, then:

"Who is 'Billy'?" I inquired, casually.

I couldn't tell whether it was a sudden gleam of sunset light on her face, or whether she blushed.

"Billy," she said softly, "is a friend of father's. His name is William Green."

"Oh."

"He is coming out here to visit—father—I believe."

"Oh. An artist; and doubtless of mature years."

"He is a mineralogist by profession," she said, "—and somewhat young."

"Oh."

"Twenty-four years old," she added. Upon her pretty face was an absent expression, vaguely pleasant. Her blue eyes became dreamy and exquisitely remote.

I pondered deeply for a while:

"Wilna?" I said.

"Yes, Mr. Smith?" as though aroused from agreeable meditation.

But I didn't know exactly what to say, and I remained uneasily silent, thinking about that man Green and his twenty-four years, and his profession, and the bottom of the crater, and Wilna—and striving to satisfy myself that there was no logical connection between any of these.

"I think," said I, "that I'll take a bucket of salad to your father."

Why I should have so suddenly determined to ingratiate myself with the old grouch I scarcely understood: for the construction of a salad was my very best accomplishment.

Wilna looked at me in a peculiar manner, almost as though she were controlling a sudden and not unpleasant inward desire to laugh.

Evidently the finer and more delicate instincts of a woman were divining my motive and sympathizing with my mental and sentimental perplexity.

So when she said: "I don't think you had better go near my father," I was convinced of her gentle solicitude in my behalf.

"With a bucket of salad," I whispered softly, "much may be accomplished, Wilna." And I took her little hand and pressed it gently and respectfully. "Trust all to me," I murmured.

She stood with her head turned away from me, her slim hand resting limply in mine. From the slight tremor of her shoulders I became aware how deeply her emotion was now swaying her. Evidently she was nearly ready to become mine.

But I remained calm and alert. The time was not yet. Her father had had his prunes, in which he delighted. And when pleasantly approached with a bucket of salad he could not listen otherwise than politely to what I had to say to him. Quick action was necessary—quick but diplomatic action—in view of the imminence of this young man Green, who evidently was *persona grata* at the bungalow of this irritable old dodo.

Tenderly pressing the pretty hand which I held, and saluting the finger-tips with a gesture which was, perhaps, not wholly ungraceful, I stepped into the kitchen, washed out several heads of lettuce, deftly chopped up some youthful onions, constructed a seductive French dressing, and, stirring together the crisp ingredients, set the savoury masterpiece away in the ice-box, after tasting it. It was delicious enough to draw sobs from any pig.

When I went out to the veranda, Wilna had disappeared. So I unfolded and set up some more box-traps, determined to lose no time.

Sunset still lingered beyond the chain of western mountains as I went out across the grassy plateau to the cornfield.

Here I set and baited several dozen aluminium crow-traps, padding the jaws so that no injury could be done to the birds when the springs snapped on their legs.

Then I went over to the crater and descended its gentle, grassy slope. And there, all along the borders of the vapoury wall, I set box-traps for the lithe little denizens of the fire, baiting every trap with a handful of fresh, sweet clover which I had pulled up from the pasture beyond the cornfield.

My task ended, I ascended the slope again, and for a while stood there immersed in pleasurable premonitions.

Everything had been accomplished swiftly and methodically within the few hours in which I had first set eyes upon this extraordinary place—everything!—love at first sight, the delightfully lightning-like wooing and winning of an incomparable maiden and heiress; the discovery of the fire creatures; the solving of the emerald problem.

And now everything was ready, crow-traps, fire-traps, a bucket of irresistible salad for Blythe, a modest and tremulous avowal for Wilna as soon as her father tasted the salad and I had pleasantly notified him of my intentions concerning his lovely offspring.

Daylight faded from rose to lilac; already the mountains were growing fairy-like under that vague, diffuse lustre which heralds the rise of the full moon. It rose, enormous, yellow, unreal, becoming imperceptibly silvery as it climbed the sky and hung aloft like a stupendous arc-light flooding the world with a radiance so white and clear that I could very easily have written verses by it, if I wrote verses.

Down on the edge of the forest I could see Blythe on his camp-stool, madly besmearing his moonlit canvas, but I could not see Wilna anywhere. Maybe she had shyly retired somewhere by herself to think of me.

So I went back to the house, filled a bucket with my salad, and started toward the edge of the woods, singing happily as I sped on feet so light and frolicsome that they seemed to skim the ground. How wonderful is the power of love!

When I approached Blythe he heard me coming and turned around.

"What the devil do *you* want?" he asked with characteristic civility.

"I have brought you," said I gaily, "a bucket of salad."

"I don't want any salad!"

"W-what?"

"I never eat it at night."

I said confidently:

"Mr. Blythe, if you will taste this salad I am sure you will not regret it." And with hideous cunning I set the bucket beside him on the grass and seated myself near it. The old dodo grunted and continued to daub the canvas; but presently, as though forgetfully, and from sheer instinct, he reached down into the bucket, pulled out a leaf of lettuce, and shoved it into his mouth.

My heart leaped exultantly. I had him!

"Mr. Blythe," I began in a winningly modulated voice, and, at the same instant, he sprang from his camp-chair, his face distorted.

"There are onions in this salad!" he yelled. "What the devil do you mean! Are you trying to poison me! What are you following me about for, anyway? Why are you running about under foot every minute!"

"My dear Mr. Blythe," I protested—but he barked at me, kicked over the bucket of salad, and began to dance with rage.

"What's the matter with you, anyway!" he bawled. "Why are you trying to feed me? What do you mean by trying to be attentive to me!"

"I—I admire and revere you—"

"No you don't!" he shouted. "I don't want you to admire me! I don't desire to be revered! I don't like attention and politeness! Do you hear! It's artificial—out of date—ridiculous! The only thing that recommends a man to me is his bad manners, bad temper, and violent habits. There's some meaning to such a man, none at all to men like you!"

He ran at the salad bucket and kicked it again.

"They all fawned on me in Boston!" he panted. "They ran about under foot! They bought my pictures! And they made me sick! I came out here to be rid of 'em!"

I rose from the grass, pale and determined.

"You listen to me, you old grouch!" I hissed. "I'll go. But before I go I'll tell you why I've been civil to you. There's only one reason in the world: I want to marry your daughter! And I'm going to do it!"

I stepped nearer him, menacing him with outstretched hand:

"As for you, you pitiable old dodo, with your bad manners and your worse pictures, and your degraded mania for prunes, you are a necessary evil, that's all, and I haven't the slightest respect for either you or your art!"

"Is that true?" he said in an altered voice.

"True?" I laughed bitterly. "Of course it's true, you miserable dauber!"

"D-dauber!" he stammered.

"Certainly! I *said* 'dauber,' and I mean it. Why, your work would shame the pictures on a child's slate!"

"Smith," he said unsteadily, "I believe I have utterly misjudged you. I believe you are a good deal of a man, after all—"

"I'm man enough," said I, fiercely, "to go back, saddle my mule, kidnap your daughter, and start for home. And I'm going to do it!"

"Wait!" he cried. "I don't want you to go. If you'll remain I'll be very glad. I'll do anything you like. I'll quarrel with you, and you can insult my pictures. It will agreeably stimulate us both. Don't go, Smith—"

"If I stay, may I marry Wilna?"

"If you ask me I won't let you!"

"Very well!" I retorted, angrily. "Then I'll marry her anyway!"

"That's the way to talk! Don't go, Smith. I'm really beginning to like you. And when Billy Green arrives you and he will have a delightfully violent scene—"

"What!"

He rubbed his hands gleefully.

"He's in love with Wilna. You and he won't get on. It is going to be very stimulating for me—I can see that! You and he are going to behave most disagreeably to each other. And I shall be exceedingly unpleasant to you both! Come, Smith, promise me that you'll stay!"

Profoundly worried, I stood staring at him in the moonlight, gnawing my mustache.

"Very well," I said, "I'll remain if—"

Something checked me, I did not quite know what for a moment. Blythe, too, was staring at me in an odd, apprehensive way. Suddenly I realised that under my feet the ground was stirring.

"Look out!" I cried; but speech froze on my lips as beneath me the solid earth began to rock and crack and billow up into a high, crumbling ridge, moving continually, as the sod cracks, heaves up, and crumbles above the subterranean progress of a mole.

Up into the air we were slowly pushed on the ever-growing ridge; and with us were carried rocks and bushes and sod, and even forest trees.

I could hear their tap-roots part with pistol-like reports; see great pines and hemlocks and oaks moving, slanting, settling, tilting crazily in every direction as they were heaved upward in this gigantic disturbance.

Blythe caught me by the arm; we clutched each other, balancing on the crest of the steadily rising mound.

"W-what is it?" he stammered. "Look! It's circular. The woods are rising in a huge circle. What's happening? Do you know?"

Over me crept a horrible certainty that *something living* was moving under us through the depths of the earth—something that, as it progressed, was heaping up the surface of the world above its unseen and burrowing course—something dreadful, enormous, sinister, and *alive!*

"Look out!" screamed Blythe; and at the same instant the crumbling summit of the ridge opened under our feet and a fissure hundreds of yards long yawned ahead of us.

And along it, shining slimily in the moonlight, a vast, viscous, ringed surface was moving, retracting, undulating, elongating, writhing, squirming, shuddering.

"It's a worm!" shrieked Blythe. "Oh, God! It's a mile long !"

As in a nightmare we clutched each other, struggling frantically to avoid the fissure; but the soft earth slid and gave way under us, and we fell heavily upon that ghastly, living surface.

Instantly a violent convulsion hurled us upward; we fell on it again, rebounding from the rubbery thing, strove to regain our feet and scramble up the edges of the fissure, strove madly while the mammoth worm slid more rapidly through the rocking forests, carrying us forward with a speed increasing.

Through the forest we tore, reeling about on the slippery back of the thing, as though riding on a plowshare, while trees clashed and tilted and fell from the enormous furrow on every side; then, suddenly out of the woods into the moonlight, far ahead of us we could see the grassy upland heave up, cake, break, and crumble above the burrowing course of the monster.

"It's making for the crater!" gasped Blythe; and horror spurred us on, and we scrambled and slipped and clawed the billowing sides of the furrow until we gained the heaving top of it.

As one runs in a bad dream, heavily, half-paralyzed, so ran Blythe and I, toiling over the undulating, tumbling upheaval until, half-fainting, we fell and rolled down the shifting slope onto solid and unvexed sod on the very edges of the crater.

Below us we saw, with sickened eyes, the entire circumference of the crater agitated, saw it rise and fall as avalanches of rock and earth slid into it, tons and thousands of tons rushing down the slope, blotting from our sight the flickering ring of flame, and extinguishing the last filmy jet of vapour.

Suddenly the entire crater caved in and filled up under my anguished eyes, quenching for all eternity the vapour wall, the fire, and burying the little denizens of the flames, and perhaps a billion dollars' worth of emeralds under as many billion tons of earth.

Quieter and quieter grew the earth as the gigantic worm bored straight down into depths immeasurable. And at last the moon shone upon a world that lay without a tremor in its milky lustre.

"I shall name it *Verma gigantica,*" said I, with a hysterical sob; "but nobody will ever believe me when I tell this story!"

Still terribly shaken, we turned toward the house. And, as we approached the lamplit veranda, I saw a horse standing there and a young man hastily dismounting.

And then a terrible thing occurred; for, before I could even shriek, Wilna had put both arms around that young man's neck, and both of his arms were clasping her waist.

Blythe was kind to me. He took me around the back way and put me to bed.

And there I lay through the most awful night I ever experienced, listening to the piano below, where Wilna and William Green were singing, "Un Peu d'Amour." ❋

The Eggs of the Silver Moon

In the new white marble Administration Building at Bronx Park, my private office separated the offices of Dr. Silas Quint and Professor Boomly; and it had been arranged so on purpose, because of the increasingly frequent personal misunderstanding between these two celebrated entomologists. It was very plain to me that a crisis in this quarrel was rapidly approaching.

A bitter animosity had for some months existed on both sides, born of the most intense professional jealousy. They had been friends for years. No unseemly rivalry disturbed this friendship as long as it was merely a question of collecting, preparing, and mounting for exhibition the vast numbers of butterflies and moths which haunt this insectivorous earth. Even their zeal in the eternal hunt for new and undescribed species had not made them enemies.

I am afraid that my suggestion for the construction of a great glass flying-cage for *living* specimens of moths and butterflies started the trouble between these hitherto godly and middle-aged men. That, and the Carnegie Educational Medal were the causes which began this deplorable affair.

Various field collectors, employed by both Quint and Boomly, were always out all over the world foraging for specimens; also, they were constantly returning with spoils from every quarter of the globe.

Now, to secure rare and beautiful living specimens of butterflies and moths for the crystal flying-cage was a serious and delicate job. Such tropical insects could not survive the journey of several months from the wilds of Australia, India, Asia, Africa, or the jungles of South America—nor could semi-tropical species endure the captivity of a few weeks or even days, when captured in the West Indies, Mexico, or Florida. Only our duller-coloured, smaller, and hardier native species tolerated capture and exhibition.

Therefore, the mode of procedure which I suggested was for our field expeditions to obtain males and females of the same species of butterfly or moth, mate them, and, as soon as any female deposited her eggs, place the tiny pearl-like eggs in cold storage to retard their hatching, which normally occurs, in the majority of species, within ten days or two weeks.

This now was the usual mode of procedure followed by the field collectors employed by Dr. Quint and Professor Boomly. And not only were the eggs of various butterflies and moths so packed for transportation, but a sufficient store of their various native food-plants was also preserved, where such food-plants could not be procured in the United States. So when the eggs arrived at Bronx Park, and were hatched there in due time, the young caterpillars had plenty of nourishment ready for them in cold storage.

Might I not, legitimately, have expected the Carnegie Educational Medal for all this? I have never received it. I say this without indignation—even without sorrow. I merely make the statement.

Yet, my system was really a very beautiful system; a tiny batch of eggs would arrive from Ceylon, or Sumatra, or Africa; when taken from cold storage and placed in the herbarium they would presently hatch; the caterpillars were fed with their accustomed food-plant—a few leaves being taken from cold storage every day for them—they would pass through their three or four moulting periods, cease feeding in due time, transform into the chrysalis stage, and finally appear in all the splendour and magnificence of butterfly or moth.

The great glass flying-cage was now alive with superb moths and butterflies, flitting, darting, fluttering among the flowering bushes or feeding along the sandy banks of the brook which flowed through the flying-cage, bordered by thickets of scented flowers. And it was like looking at a meteoric shower of winged jewels, where the huge metallic-blue *Morphos* from South America flapped and sailed, and the orange and gold and green *Ornithoptera* from Borneo pursued their majestic, bird-like flight—where big, glittering *Papilios* flashed through the bushes or alighted nervously to feed for a few moments on jasmine and phlox, and where the slowly flopping *Heliconians* winged their way amid the denser tangles of tropical vegetation.

Nothing like this flying-cage had ever before been seen in New York; thousands and thousands of men, women, and children thronged the lawn about the flying-cage all day long.

By night, also, the effect was wonderful; the electric lights among the foliage broke out; the great downy-winged moths, which had been asleep all day while the butterflies flitted through the sunshine, now came out to display their crimson or peacock-spotted wings, and the butterflies folded their wings and went to bed for the night.

The public was enchanted, the authorities of the Bronx proud and delighted; all apparently was happiness and harmony. Except that nobody offered me the Carnegie medal.

I was sitting one morning in my office, which, as I have said, separated the offices of Dr. Quint and Professor Boomly, when there came a loud rapping on my door, and, at my invitation, Dr. Quint bustled in—a little, meagre, excitable, near-sighted man with pointed mustaches and a fleck of an imperial smudging his lower lip.

"Last week," he began angrily, "young Jones arrived from Singapore bringing me the eggs of *Erebia astarte,* the great Silver Moon butterfly. Attempts to destroy them have been made. Last night I left them in a breeding-cage on my desk. Has anybody been in there?"

"I don't know," I said. "What has happened?"

"I found an ichneumon fly in the cage yesterday!" he shouted; "and this morning the eggs have either shrunk to half their size or else the eggs of another species have been secretly substituted for them and the Silver Moon eggs stolen! Has *he* been in there?"

"Who?" I asked, pretending to misunderstand.

"*He!*" demanded Quint fiercely. "If he has I'll kill him some day."

He meant his one-time friend, Dr. Boomly. Alas!

"For heaven's sake, why are you two perpetually squabbling?" I asked wearily. "You used to be inseparable friends. Why can't you make up?"

"Because I've come to know him. That's why! I have unmasked this—this Borgia—this Machiavelli—this monster of duplicity! Matters are approaching a point where something has got to be done short of murder. I've stood all his envy and jealousy and cheap imputations and hints and contemptible innuendoes that I'm going to—"

He stopped short, glaring at the doorway, which had suddenly been darkened by the vast bulk of Professor Boomly—a figure abdominal but majestic—like the massive butt end of an elephant. For the rest, he had a rather insignificant and peevish face and a melancholy mustache that usually looked damp.

"Mr. Smith," he said to me, in his thin, high, sarcastic voice—a voice incongruously at variance with his bulk—"has anybody had the infernal impudence to enter my room and nose about my desk?"

"Yes, *I* have!" replied Quint excitedly. "I've been in your room. What of it? What about it?"

Boomly permitted his heavy-lidded eyes to rest on Quint for a moment, then, turning to me:

"I want a patent lock put on my door. Will you speak to Professor Farrago?"

"I want one put on mine, too!" cried Quint. "I want a lock put on my door which will keep envious, dull-minded, mentally broken-down, impertinent, and fat people out of my office!"

Boomly flushed heavily:

"Fat?" he repeated, glaring at Quint. "Did you say 'fat'?"

"Yes, *fat*—intellectually and corporeally fat! I want that kind of individual kept out. I don't trust them. I'm afraid of them. Their minds are atrophied. They are unmoral, possibly even criminal! I don't want them in my room snooping about to see what I have and what I'm doing. I don't want them to sneak in, eaten up with jealousy and envy, and try to damage the eggs of the Silver Moon butterfly because the honour and glory of hatching them would probably procure for me the Carnegie Educational Medal—"

"Why, you little, dried-up, protoplasmic atom!" burst out Boomly, his face suffused with passion. "Are you insinuating that I have any designs on your batch of eggs?"

"It's my belief," shouted Quint, "that you want that medal yourself, and that you put an ichneumon fly in my breeding-cage in hopes it would sting the eggs of the Silver Moon."

"If you found an ichneumon fly there," retorted Boomly, "you probably hatched it in mistake for a butterfly!" And he burst into a peal of contemptuous laughter, but his little, pig-like eyes under the heavy lids were furious.

"I now believe," said Quint, trembling with rage, "that you have criminally substituted a batch of common *Plexippus* eggs for the Silver Moon eggs I had in my breeding-cage! I believe you are sufficiently abandoned to do it!"

"Ha! Ha!" retorted Boomly scornfully. "I don't believe you ever had anything in your breeding-cage except a few clothes moths and cockroaches!"

Quint began to dance:

"You *did* take them!" he yelled; "and you left me a bunch of milkweed butterflies' eggs! Give me my eggs or I shall violently assault you!"

"Assault your grandmother!" remarked Boomly, with unscientific brevity. "What do you suppose I want of your ridiculous eggs? Haven't I enough eggs of *Heliconius salome* hatching to give me the Carnegie medal if I want it?"

"The Silver Moon eggs are unique!" cried Quint. "You know it! You know that if they hatch, pupate, and become perfect insects that I shall certainly be awarded—"

"You'll be awarded the Matteawan medal," remarked Boomly with venom.

Quint ran at him with a half-suppressed howl, his momentum carrying him halfway up Professor Boomly's person. Then, losing foothold, he fell to the floor and began to kick in the general direction of Professor Boomly. It was a sorrowful sight to see these two celebrated scientists panting, mauling, scuffling and punching each other around the room, tables and chairs and scrapbaskets flying in every direction, and I mounted on the windowsill horrified, speechless, trying to keep clear of the revolving storm centre.

"Where are my Silver Moon eggs!" screamed Dr. Quint. "Where are my eggs that Jones brought me from Singapore—you entomological robber! You've got 'em somewhere! If you don't give 'em up I'll find means to destroy you!"

"You insignificant pair of maxillary palpi!" bellowed Professor Boomly, galloping after Dr. Quint as he dodged around my desk. "I'll pull off those antennae you call whiskers if I can get hold of 'em—"

Dr. Quint's threatened mustaches bristled as he fled before the elephantine charge of Professor Boomly—once again around my desk, then out into the hall, where I heard the door of his office slam, and Boomly, gasping, panting, breathing vengeance outside, and vowing to leave Quint quite whiskerless when he caught him.

It was a painful scene for scientists to figure in or to gaze upon. Profoundly shocked and upset, I locked up the anthropological department offices and went out into the Park, where the sun was shining and a gentle June wind stirred the trees.

Too completely upset to do any more work that day, I wandered about amid the gaily dressed crowds at hazard; sometimes I contemplated the monkeys; sometimes gazed sadly upon the seals. They dashed and splashed and raced round and round their tank, or crawled up on the rocks, craned their wet, sleek necks, and barked—houp! houp! houp!

For luncheon I went over to the Rolling Stone Restaurant. There was a very pretty girl there—an unusually pretty girl—or perhaps it was one of those days on which every girl looked unusually pretty to me. There are such days.

Her voice was exquisite when she spoke. She said:

"We have, today, corned beef hash, fried ham and eggs, liver and bacon—" but let that pass, too.

I took my tea very weak; by that time I learned that her name was Mildred Case; that she had been a private detective employed in a department store, and that her duties had been to nab wealthy ladies who forgot to pay for objects usually discovered in their reticules, bosoms, and sometimes in their stockings.

But the confinement of indoor work had been too much for Mildred Case, and the only out-door job she could find was the position of lady waitress in the rustic Rolling Stone Inn.

She was very, very beautiful, or perhaps it was one of those days—but let that pass, too.

"You are the great Mr. Percy Smith, Curator of the Anthropological Department, are you not?" she asked shyly.

"Yes," I said modestly; and, to slightly rebuke any superfluous pride in me, I paraphrased with becoming humility, pointing upward: "but remember, Mildred, there is One greater than I."

"Mr. Carnegie?" she nodded innocently. That was true, too. I let it go at that.

We chatted: she mentioned Professor Boomly and Dr. Quint, gently deploring the rupture of their friendship. Both gentlemen, in common with the majority of the administration personnel, were daily customers at the Rolling Stone Inn. I usually took my lunch from my boarding-house to my office, being too busy to go out for mere nourishment.

That is why I had hitherto missed Mildred Case.

"Mildred," I said, "I do not believe it can be wholesome for a man to eat sandwiches while taking minute measurements of defunct monkeys. Also, it is not a fragrant pastime. Hereafter I shall lunch here."

"It will be a pleasure to serve you," said that unusually—there I go again! It was an unusually beautiful day in June. Which careful, exact, and scientific statement, I think ought to cover the subject under consideration.

After luncheon I sadly selected a five-cent cigar; and, as I hesitated, lingering over the glass case, undecided still whether to give full rein to this contemplated extravagance, I looked up and found her beautiful grey eyes gazing into mine.

"What gentle thoughts are yours, Mildred?" I said softly.

"The cigar you have selected," she murmured, "is fly-specked."

Deeply touched that this young girl should have cared—that she should have expressed her solicitude so modestly, so sweetly, concerning the maculatory condition of my cigar, I thanked her and purchased, for the same sum, a packet of cigarettes.

That was going somewhat far for me. I had never in all my life even dreamed of smoking a cigarette. To a reserved, thoughtful, and scientific mind there is, about a packet of cigarettes, something undignified, something vaguely frolicsome.

When I paid her for them I felt as though, for the first time in my life, I had let myself go.

Oddly enough, in this uneasy feeling of gaiety and abandon, a curious sensation of exhilaration persisted.

We had quite a merry little contretemps when I tried to light my cigarette and the match went out, and then *she* struck another match, and we both laughed, and *that* match was extinguished by her breath.

Instantly I quoted: "'Her breath was like the new-mown hay—'"

"Mr. Smith!" she said, flushing slightly.

"'Her eyes,' I quoted, 'were like the stars at even!'"

"You don't mean *my* eyes, do you?"

I took a puff at my unlighted cigarette. It also smelled like recently mown hay. I felt that I was slipping my cables and heading toward an unknown and tempestuous sea.

"What time are you free, Mildred?" I asked, scarcely recognising my own voice in such reckless apropos.

She shyly informed me.

I struck a match, re-lighted my cigarette, and took one puff. That was sufficient: I was adrift. I realised it, trembled internally, took another puff.

"If," said I carelessly, "on your way home you should chance to stroll along the path beyond the path that leads to the path which—"

I paused, checked by her bewildered eyes. We both blushed.

"Which way do you usually go home?" I asked, my ears afire.

She told me. It was a suitably unfrequented path.

So presently I strolled thither; and seated myself under the trees in a bosky dell.

Now, there is a quality in boskiness not inappropriate to romantic thoughts. Boskiness, cigarettes, a soft afternoon in June, the hum of bees, and the distant barking of the seals, all these were delicately blending to inspire in me a bashful sentiment.

A specimen of *Papilio turnus,* di-morphic form, *Glaucus,* alighted near me; I marked its flight with scientific indifference. Yet it is a rare species in Bronx Park.

A mock-orange bush was in snowy bloom behind me; great bunches of wistaria hung over the rock beside me.

The combination of these two exquisite perfumes seemed to make the boskiness more bosky.

There was an unaccustomed and sportive lightness to my step when I rose to meet Mildred, where she came loitering along the shadow-dappled path.

She seemed surprised to see me.

She thought it rather late to sit down, but she seated herself. I talked to her enthusiastically about anthropology. She was so interested that after a while she could scarcely keep still, moving her slim little feet restlessly, biting her pretty lower lip, shifting her position—all certain symptoms of an interest in science which even approached excitement.

Warmed to the heart by her eager and sympathetic interest in the noble science so precious, so dear to me, I took her little hand to soothe and quiet her, realizing that she might become overexcited as I described the pituitary body and why its former functions had become atrophied until the gland itself was nearly obsolete.

So intense her interest had been that she seemed a little tired. I decided to give adequate material support to her spinal process. It seemed to rest and soothe her. I don't remember that she said anything except: "Mr. *Smith!*" I don't recollect what we were saying when she mentioned me by name rather abruptly.

The afternoon was wonderfully still and calm. The month was June.

After a while—quite a while—some little time in point of accurate fact—she detected the sound of approaching footsteps.

I remember that she was seated at the opposite end of the bench, rather feverishly occupied with her hat and her hair, when young Jones came hastily along the path, caught sight of us, halted, turned violently red—being a shy young man—but instead of taking himself off, he seemed to recover from a momentary paralysis.

"Mr. Smith!" he said sharply. "Professor Boomly has disappeared; there's a pool of blood on his desk; his coat, hat, and waistcoat are lying on the floor, the room is a wreck, and Dr. Quint is in there tearing up the carpet and behaving like a madman. We think he suddenly went insane and murdered Professor Boomly. What is to be done?"

Horrified, I had risen at his first word. And now, as I understood the full purport of his dreadful message, my hair stirred under my hat and I gazed at him, appalled.

"What is to be done?" he demanded. "Shall I telephone for the police?"

"Do you actually believe," I faltered, "that this unfortunate man has murdered Boomly?"

"I don't know. I looked over the transom, but I couldn't see Professor Boomly. Dr. Quint has locked the door."

"And he's tearing up the carpet?"

"Like a lunatic. I didn't want to call in the police until I'd asked you. Such a scandal in Bronx Park would be a frightful thing for us all—" He hesitated, looked around, coldly, it seemed to me, at Mildred Case. "A scandal," he repeated, "is scarcely what might be expected among a harmonious and earnest band of seekers after scientific knowledge. Is it, Mil—Miss Case?"

Now, I don't know why Mildred should have blushed. There was nothing that I could see in this young man's question to embarrass her.

Preoccupied, still confused by the shock of this terrible news, I looked at Jones and at Mildred; and they were staring rather oddly at each other.

I said: "If this affair turns out to be as ghastly as it seems to promise, we'll have to call in a detective. I'll go back immediately—"

"Why not take me, also?" asked Mildred Case, quietly.

"What?" I asked, looking at her.

"Why not, Mr. Smith? I was once a private detective."

Surprised at the suggestion, I hesitated.

"If you desire to keep this matter secret—if you wish to have it first investigated privately and quietly—would it not be a good idea to let me use my professional knowledge before you call in the police? Because as soon as the police are summoned all hope of avoiding publicity is at an end."

She spoke so sensibly, so quietly, so modestly, that her offer of assistance deeply impressed me.

As for young Jones, he looked at her steadily in that odd, chilling manner, which finally annoyed me. There was no need of his being snobbish because this very lovely and intelligent young girl happened to be a waitress at the Rolling Stone Inn.

"Come," I said unsteadily, again a prey to terrifying emotions; "let us go to the Administration Building and learn how matters stand. If this affair is as terrible as I fear it to be, science has received the deadliest blow ever dealt it since Cagliostro perished."

As we three strode hastily along the path in the direction of the Administration Building, I took that opportunity to read these two youthful fellow beings a sermon on envy, jealousy, and covetousness.

"See," said I, "to what a miserable condition the desire for notoriety and fame has brought two learned and enthusiastic delvers in the vineyard of endeavor! The mad desire for the Carnegie medal completely turned the hitherto perfectly balanced brains of these devoted disciples of Science. Envy begat envy, jealousy begat jealousy, pride begat pride, hatred begat hatred—"

"It's like that book in the Bible where everybody begat everybody else," said Mildred seriously.

At first I thought she had made an apt and clever remark; but on thinking it over I couldn't quite see its relevancy. I turned and looked into her sweet face. Her eyes were dancing with brilliancy and her sensitive lips quivered. I feared she was near to tears from the reaction of the shock. Had Jones not been walking with us—but let that go, too.

We were now entering the Administration Building, almost running; and as soon as we came to the closed door of Dr. Quint's room, I could hear a commotion inside—desk drawers being pulled out and their contents dumped, curtains being jerked from their rings, an unmistakable sound indicating the ripping up of a carpet—and through all this din the agitated scuffle of footsteps.

I rapped on the door. No notice taken. I rapped and knocked and called in a low, distinct voice.

Suddenly I recollected I had a general pass-key on my ring which unlocked any door in the building. I nodded to Jones and to Mildred to stand aside, then, gently fitting the key, I suddenly pushed out the key which remained on the inside, turned the lock, and flung open the door.

A terrible sight presented itself: Dr. Quint, hair on end, both mustaches pulled out, shirt, cuffs, and white waistcoat smeared with blood, knelt amid the general wreckage on the floor, in the act of ripping up the carpet.

"Doctor!" I cried in a trembling voice. "What have you done to Professor Boomly?"

He paused in his carpet ripping and looked around at us with a terrifying laugh.

"I've settled *him!*" he said. "If you don't want to get all over dust you'd better keep out—"

"Quint!" I cried. "Are you crazy?"

"Pretty nearly. Let me alone—"

"Where is Boomly!" I demanded in a tragic voice. "Where is your old friend, Billy Boomly? Where is he, Quint? And what does *that* mean—that pool of blood on the floor? Whose is it?"

"It's Bill's," said Quint, coolly ripping up another breadth of carpet and peering under it.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Do you admit that?"

"Certainly I admit it. I told him I'd terminate him if he meddled with my Silver Moon eggs."

"You mean to say that you shed blood—the blood of your old friend—merely because he meddled with a miserable batch of butterfly's eggs?" I asked, astounded.

"I certainly did shed his blood for just that particular thing! And listen; you're in my way—you're standing on a part of the carpet which I want to tear up. Do you mind moving?"

Such cold-blooded calmness infuriated me. I sprang at Quint, seized him, and shouted to Jones to tie his hands behind him with the blood-soaked handkerchief which lay on the floor.

At first, while Jones and I were engaged in the operation of securing the wretched man, Quint looked at us both as though surprised; then he grew angry and asked us what the devil we were about.

"Those who shed blood must answer for it!" I said solemnly.

"What? What's the matter with you?" he demanded in a rage. "Shed blood? What if I did? What's that to you? Untie this handkerchief, you unmentionable idiot!"

I looked at Jones:

"His mind totters," I said hoarsely.

"What's that!" cried Quint, struggling to get off the chair whither I had pushed him: but with my handkerchief we tied his ankles to the rung of the chair, heedless of his attempts to kick us, and sprang back out of range.

"Now," I said, "what have you done with the poor victim of your fury? Where is he? Where is all that remains of Professor Boomly?"

"Boomly? I don't know where he is. How the devil should I know?"

"Don't lie," I said solemnly.

"Lie! See here, Smith, when I get out of this chair I'll settle you, too—"

"Quint! There is another and more terrible chair which awaits such criminals as you!"

"You old fluff!" he shouted. "I'll knock your head off, too. Do you understand? I'll attend to you as I attended to Boomly—"

"Assassin!" I retorted calmly. "Only an alienist can save you now. In this awful moment—"

A light touch on my arm interrupted me, and, a trifle irritated, as any man might be when checked in the full flow of eloquence, I turned to find Mildred at my elbow.

"Let me talk to him," she said in a quiet voice. "Perhaps I may not irritate him as you seem to."

"Very well," I said. "Jones and I are here as witnesses." And I folded my arms in an attitude not, perhaps, unpicturesque.

"Dr. Quint," said Mildred in her soft, agreeable voice, and actually smiling slightly at the self-confessed murderer, "is it really true that you are guilty of shedding the blood of Professor Boomly?"

"It is," said Quint, coolly.

She seemed rather taken aback at that, but presently recovered her equanimity.

"Why?" she asked gently.

"Because he attempted a most hellish crime!" yelled Quint.

"W-what crime?" she asked faintly.

"I'll tell you. He wanted the Carnegie medal, and he knew it would be given to me if I could incubate and hatch my batch of Silver Moon butterfly eggs. He realised well enough that his Heliconian eggs were not as valuable as my Silver Moon eggs. So first he sneaked in here and put an ichneumon fly in my breeding-cage. And next he stole the Silver Moon eggs and left in their place some common *Plexippus* eggs, thinking that because they were very similar I would not notice the substitution.

"I did notice it! I charged him with that cataclysmic outrage. He laughed. We came into personal collision. He chased me into my room."

Panting, breathless with rage at the memory of the morning's defeat which I had witnessed, Quint glared at me for a moment. Then he jerked his head toward Mildred:

"As soon as he went to luncheon—Boomly, I mean—I climbed over that transom and dropped into this room. I had been hunting for ten minutes before I found my Silver Moon eggs hidden under the carpet. So I pocketed them, climbed back over the transom, and went to my room."

He paused dramatically, staring from one to another of us:

"Boomly was there!" he said slowly.

"Where?" asked Mildred with a shudder.

"In my room. He had picked the lock. I told him to get out! He went. I shouted after him that I had recovered the Silver Moon eggs and that I should certainly be awarded the Carnegie medal.

"Then that monster in human form laughed a horrible laugh, avowing himself guilty of a crime still more hideous than the theft of the Silver Moon eggs! Do you know what he had done?"

"W-what?" faltered Mildred.

"He had stolen from cold storage and had concealed the leaves of the Bimba bush, brought from Singapore to feed the Silver Moon caterpillars! *That's* what Boomly had done!

"And my Silver Moon eggs had already begun to hatch!!! And my caterpillars would starve!!!!"

His voice ended in a yell; he struggled on his chair until it nearly upset.

"You lunatic!" I shouted. "Was that a reason for spilling the blood of a human being!"

"It was reason enough for me!"

"Madman!"

"Let me loose! He's hidden those leaves somewhere or other! I've torn this place to pieces looking for them. I've got to find them, I tell you—"

Mildred went to the infuriated entomologist and laid a firm hand on his shoulder:

"Listen," she said: "how do you know that Professor Boomly has not concealed these Bimba leaves on his own person?"

Quint ceased his contortions and gaped at her.

"I never thought of that," he said.

"What have you done with him?" she asked, very pale.

"I tell you, I don't know."

"You must know what you did with him," she insisted.

Quint shook his head impatiently, apparently preoccupied with other thoughts. We stood watching him in silence until he looked up and became conscious of our concentrated gaze.

"My caterpillars are starving," he began violently. "I haven't anything else they'll eat. They feed only on the Bimba leaf. They *won't* eat anything else. It's a well-known fact that they won't. Why, in Johore, where they came from, they'll travel miles over the ground to find a Bimba bush—"

"What!" exclaimed Mildred.

"Certainly—miles! They'd starve sooner than eat anything except Bimba leaves. If there's a bush within twenty miles they'll find it—"

"Wait," said Mildred quietly. "Where are these starving caterpillars?"

"In a glass jar in my pocket—here! What the devil are you doing!" For the girl had dexterously slipped the glass jar from his coat pocket and was holding it up to the light.

Inside it were several dozen tiny, dark caterpillars, some resting disconsolately on the sides of the glass, some hungrily travelling over the bottom in pitiful and hopeless quest of nourishment.

Heedless of the shouts and threats of Dr. Quint, the girl calmly uncorked the jar, took on her slender forefinger a single little caterpillar, replaced the cork, and, kneeling down, gently disengaged the caterpillar. It dropped upon the floor, remained motionless for a moment, then, turning, began to travel rapidly toward the doorway behind us.

"Now," she said, "if poor Professor Boomly really has concealed these Bimba leaves upon his own person, this little caterpillar, according to Dr. Quint, is certain to find those leaves."

Overcome with excitement and admiration for this intelligent and unusually beautiful girl, I seized her hands and congratulated her.

"Murder," said I to the miserable Quint, "will out! This infant caterpillar shall lead us to that dark and secret spot where you had hoped to conceal the horrid evidence of your guilt. Three things have undone you—a caterpillar replete with mysterious instinct, a humble bunch of Bimba leaves, and the marvellous intelligence of this young and lovely girl. Madman, your hour has struck!"

He looked at me in a dazed sort of way, as though astonishment had left him unable to articulate. But I had become tired of his violence and his shouts and yells; so I asked Jones for his handkerchief, and, before Quint knew what I was up to I had tied it over his mouth.

He became a brilliant purple, but all he could utter was a furious humming, buzzing noise.

Meanwhile, Jones had opened the door; the little caterpillar, followed by Mildred and myself, continued to hustle along as though he knew quite well where he was going.

Down the hallway he went in undulating haste, past my door, we all following in silent excitement as we discovered that, parallel to the caterpillar's course, ran a gruesome trail of blood drops.

And when the little creature turned and made straight for the door of Professor Farrago, our revered chief, the excitement among us was terrific.

The caterpillar halted; I gently tried the door; it was open.

Instantly the caterpillar crossed the threshold, wriggling forward at top speed. We followed, peering fearfully around us. Nobody was visible.

Could Quint have dragged his victim here? By Heaven, he had! For the caterpillar was travelling straight under the lounge upon which Professor Farrago was accustomed to repose after luncheon, and, dropping on one knee, I saw a fat foot partly protruding from under the shirred edges of the fringed drapery.

"He's there!" I whispered, in an awed voice to the others.

"Courage, Miss Case! Try not to faint."

Jones turned and looked at her with that same odd expression; then he went over to where she stood and coolly passed one arm around her waist.

"Try not to faint, Mildred," he said. "It might muss your hair."

It was a strange thing to say, but I had no time then to analyze it, for I had seized the fat foot which partly protruded from under the sofa, clad in a low-cut congress-gaiter and a white sock.

And then *I* nearly fainted, for instead of the dreadful, inert resistance of lifeless clay, the foot wriggled and tried to kick at me.

"Help!" came a thin but muffled voice. "Help! Help, in the name of Heaven!"

"Boomly!" I cried, scarcely believing my ears.

"Take that man away, Smith!" whimpered Boomly. "He's a devil! He'll murder me! He made my nose bleed all over everything!"

"Boomly! You're *not* dead!"

"Yes, I am!" he whined. "I'm dead enough to suit me. Keep that little lunatic off—that's all I ask. He can have his Carnegie medal for all I care, only tie him up somewhere—"

"Professor Boomly!" cried Mildred excitedly. "Have you any Bimba leaves concealed about your person?"

"Yes, I have," he said sulkily. There came a hitch of the fat foot, a heavy scuffling sound, heavy panting, and then, skittering out across the floor came a flat, sealed parcel.

"There you are," he said; "now, let me alone until that fiend has gone home."

"He won't attack you again," I said. "Come out."

But Professor Boomly flatly declined to stir.

I looked at the parcel: it was marked: "Bimba leaves; Johore."

With a sigh of unutterable relief, I picked up the ravenous little caterpillar, placed him on the packet, and turned to go. And didn't.

It is a very sickening fact I have now to record. But to a scientist all facts are sacred, sickening or otherwise.

For what I caught a glimpse of, just outside the door in the hallway, was Jones kissing Mildred Case. And being shyly indemnified for his trouble with a gentle return in kind. Both his arms were around her waist; both her hands rested upon his shoulders; and, as I looked—but let it pass!—let it pass.

Deliberately I fished in my pocket, found my packet of cigarettes, lighted one.

Tobacco diffugiunt mordaces curae et laetificat cor hominis! ❋

ABOUT ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

Born in Brooklyn in 1865, Chambers studied art in Paris, then returned to New York in 1893 to pursue a career in magazine illustration. In the following year, he wrote *In The Quarter*, tales of bohemian life in Paris. In 1895, his story collection *The King in Yellow* was widely praised. It remains a classic among lovers of horror and the macabre. For the rest of his life, Chambers earned with his pen. He wrote some eighty books, mostly best-selling romances.

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

ABOUT S. T. JOSHI

A well known editor and literary scholar, S. T. Joshi's 1996 biography, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Life,* was widely praised and reviewed. Mr. Joshi edited the standard edition of Lovecraft's fiction, published by Arkham House, and also compiled the standard bibliography for Dunsany, published in 1993. In 1995 his critical study, *Lord Dunsany: Master of the Anglo-Irish Imagination,* appeared. His current interests include George Sterling and Ambrose Bierce. He lives in New York City.

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For a second I stared at it; a singular chilly feeling crept up my spinal column, and I turned and walked away, sweat starting from the root of every hair on my head. Before I had gone twenty paces the absurdity of the whole thing struck me. I halted, hot with shame and annoyance, and retraced my steps.

There lay the skull.

"I rolled a stone down instead of a skull," I muttered to myself. Then with the butt of my gun I pushed the skull over the edge of the pit and watched it roll to the bottom; and as it struck the bottom of the pit, Môme, my dog, suddenly whipped his tail between his legs, whimpered, and made off across the moor.

"Môme!" I shouted, angry and astonished; but the dog only fled faster, and I ceased calling from sheer surprise.

"What the mischief is the matter with that dog!" I thought. He had never before played me such a trick.

Mechanically I glanced into the pit, but I could not see the skull. I looked down. The skull lay at my feet again, touching them.

– Robert W. Chambers, "The Messenger" from **The Mystery of Choice**

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